SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION ★ ASSASSIN'S CREED II ★ BRÜTAL LEGEND

GAMEPRO®

FALL PREVIEW GUIDE 2009

53 HOT GAMES, 41 PAGES. OUR BIGGEST ISSUE OF THE YEAR!

ASSASSIN'S CREED II

HALO 3: ODST

EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON

Tom Clancy's SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION

- NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. (Wii)
- MODERN WARFARE 2
- TEKKEN 6
- BIOSHOCK 2
- JAMES CAMERON'S AVATAR
- UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES

AND MORE!

Issue 252 / SEPTEMBER 09

gamepro.com

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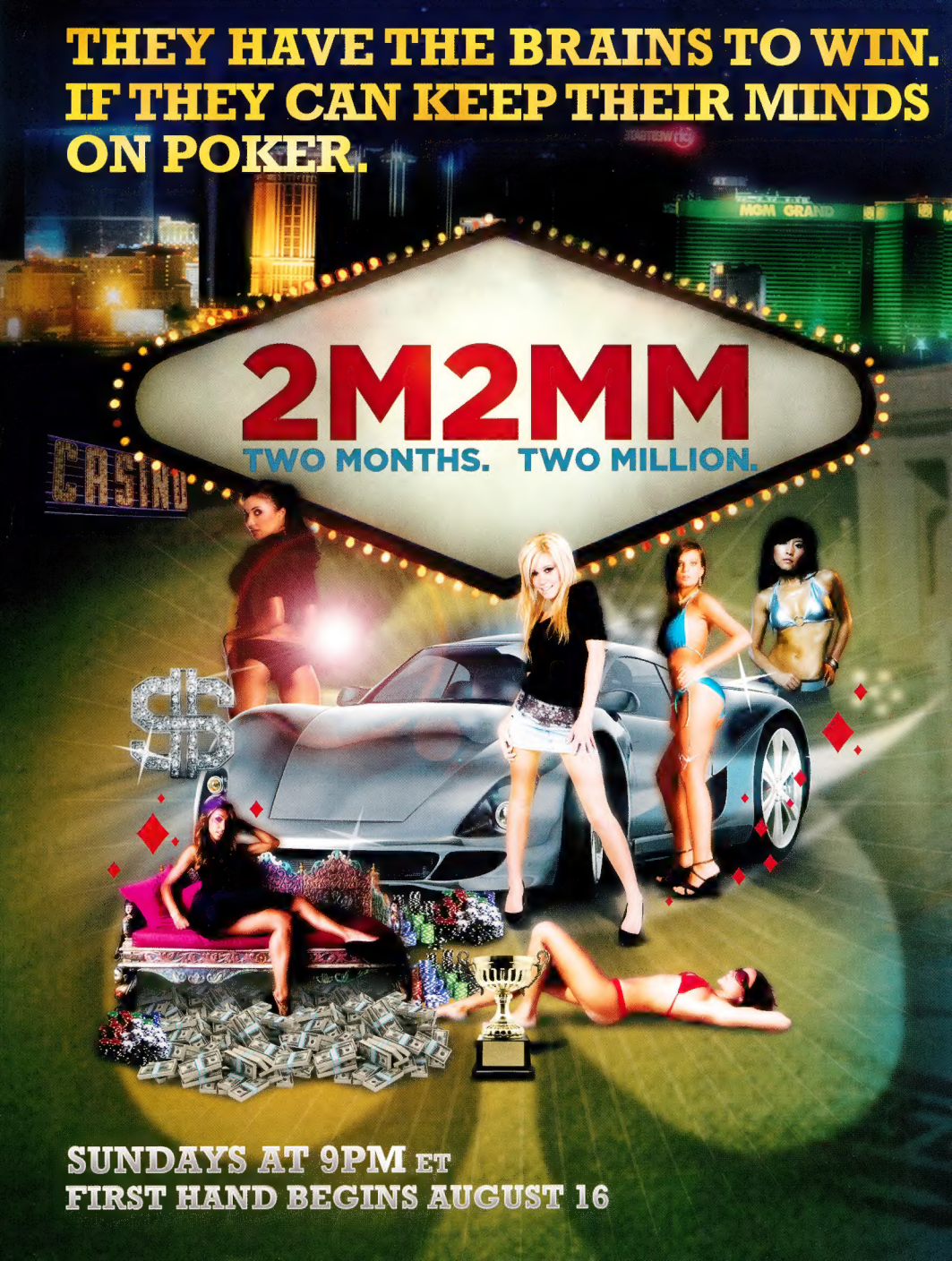
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THE STOMACH TO WORK IN AN INDUSTRY
WHOSE PRODUCTS COULD POTENTIALLY KILL
A BILLION PEOPLE THIS CENTURY
Do you have what it takes to be a tobacco exec?

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GamePro's third annual preview issue chronicles the 53 most exceptional games of the year. To kick things off, we've got exclusive new details for Splinter Cell Conviction, Brütal Legend, Uncharted 2, and Halo 3: ODST. If you plan to buy a game in 2009, start here!

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The mastermind behind No More Heroes talks to *GamePro* about his most unique games, insane influences, and his crush on Jade Raymond.

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What's better than playing through a great game? Playing through it again in a cool new way! Here are six games with great second quests.

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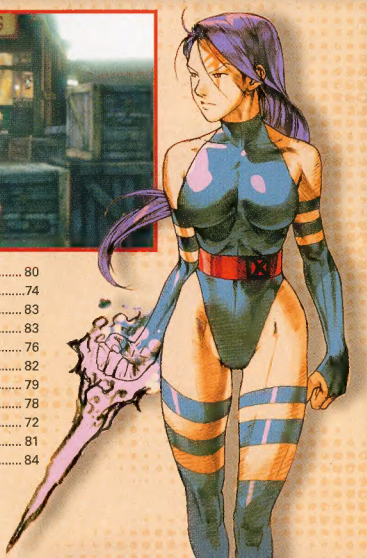

The Coming Storm: GameStop vs. Everyone Else

After speaking with game developers and publishers in 2009, I have an observation to make.

These guys *hate* GameStop. Hate, hate, *hate* them. And the resentment is growing.

Used games are a big reason why. GameStop has stocked used games for a decade or so, but more recently they've aggressively transformed used games sales into their core business. Ever have a GameStop clerk forcefully shove a used game down your throat? Now you know why. Even GameStop's recent TV ads encourage trading in your games. This drives publishers batty, because used game sales don't earn them a penny.

It's not all GameStop's fault. They make almost no profit on hardware sales, and only a couple of bucks per new game sold (publishers sell shrink-wrapped games to GameStop at $50 or $55; GameStop marks them up to $60). So the retailer has little choice but to find another way to make money. In a way, publishers have contributed to the problem by offering such low profit margins on *new* game sales. It's a tricky situation.

But there's more. Those eye-catching posters and cardboard standees decorating your local GameStop aren't free: publishers pay big money to get those promo items placed in stores nationwide. Yet from what I hear, the "compliance rate" for locations physically *placing* these marketing materials is miserable. "Less than 50 percent," one contact tells me. A common theory is some GameStop employees take the unopened posters and standees home or sell them online. Other times, the marketing materials sit in a back room, ignored. Either way, "compliance rate" has become the new battleground between the game industry and GameStop.

With publishers losing patience and digital game distribution picking up steam, is GameStop destined to become the new Blockbuster Video? I think so, but I welcome your thoughts.

Sid Shuman
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Twitter.com/sidshuman

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M
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Blood
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence
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HALO 3: ODST XBOX 360

NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA 2 PS3

DARK VOID PS3, XBOX 360, PC

Much confusion surrounds Square Enix's new MMO. Is it a PS3 exclusive or not?

Final Fantasy XIV

Alan Wake has intriguing ideas, such as the in-game narration and light-based weapons.

Alan Wake

White Knight Chronicles

DJ Hero

Every decision counts in the deeply dynamic Heavy Rain. If one of the four protagonists die, the storyline will go on without them.

Heavy Rain PS3

BioShock 2 PS3, Xbox 360, PC

Star Wars: The Old Republic

Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker PSP

Batman: Arkham Asylum

Red Dead Redemption PS3, Xbox 360

Battlefield 1943 PS3, Xbox 360, PC

Ratchet finds a friend in the badass brawler Allister, hinting at a possible co-op mode.

Ratchet and Clank Future: A Crack in Time PS3

New Super Mario Bros. Wii Wii

ModNation Racers PS3

Hidden deep in the Himalayas, Shambhala may hold the secrets of Marco Polo's secret expedition and a billion dollar jewel.

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

Bayonetta

Metroid: Other M

With dual pistols and a samurai sword, WET seeks to master stylish ultraviolence.

WET

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Brink

G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra

Frying pans, chainsaws, and a baseball bat are only a few of the new additions to grace this much anticipated cooperative zombie shooter.

Left 4 Dead 2

Final Fantasy XIII

Mafia 2

The Navy landed us here.
To learn more about how we got up to $4,000 a month with the Navy Baccalaureate Degree Completion Program (BDCP) while going to college, visit mynavymyfuture.com.
NAVY
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Free America of the oppressive foriegn invaders from your own backyard in this cinematic FPS.

Homefront

SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs: Fireteam Bravo 3

Dead to Rights: Retribution

If you love gory kills, profuse profanity, and Mickey Rourke, this is the shooter for you.

Rogue Warrior

God of War III PS3

Soul Calibur: Broken Destiny PSP

David Ortiz smashes the ball into No Man's Land in the upcoming sequel to The Bigs.

The Bigs 2 PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, PSP

Just Cause 2 PS3, Xbox 360, PC

Madden NFL 10 PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, PSP

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M
Blood
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PREPARE TO DROP

HALO 3
ODST
ORBITAL DROP SHOCK TROOPER

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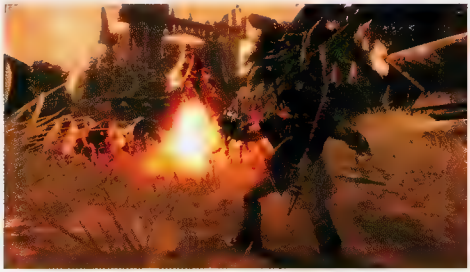
XBOX 360

Taking a turn for the spooky, Point Lookout opens up a whole new dark and depraved part of the Wastleland located along the coast of Maryland.

Fallout 3: Point Lookout PS3, Xbox 360, PC



Brütal Legend PS3, Xbox 360,

Guitar Hero 5 PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2

With a new campaign chapter called Road to Ruin and seven new multiplayer maps, Dark Corners offers a new lease on life for Gears of War 2.

Gears of War 2: Dark Corners DLC Xbox 360

When you've got 50 minions on your side, being a nice guy is strictly optional.

OVERLORD II

The six playable classes in this FPS MMO are Spec Ops, Psy Ops, Weapon Specialist, Tactical Specialist, Field Tech, and Field Medic.

THE AGENCY

Yet another Diablo clone rises onto the Xbox 360 and PC. In Risen, players will customize their characters in weapons, classes, and fighting style.

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Inside Spawn Point

No More Heroes 2 Interview . . . Page 24
The Six Best Second Quests . . . Page 26

The Mystery of The Legend of Zelda

The next Zelda game for Wii is quite the enigma. What does the first image of the game tell us? Here are four things we've noticed.

1 No Master

You'll notice that Link is not holding a sword in this picture, nor is one slung across his back. This has led to intense speculation about our second observation.

2 The Ghostly Girl

This mysterious female character is standing with her back to Link. We can see two jewels affixed to her body, as well as gold trim lining her stomach. All of this leads us to believe that this apparition is, in fact, the newest incarnation of the Master Sword. Almost every Zelda title has included Link transforming or transporting, so why not his sword?

3 Forged in Steel

The shiny silver lettering of "The Legend of Zelda" logo seems to reiterate the fact that the Master Sword will be a central part of the game. And it does seem to match that mysterious girl...

4 Break Down The Wall

Link and his female companion seem to be standing against a destroyed wall. Busting down walls with bombs is a common Zelda action, but we don't think this image would include it for that reason. In fact, the bright orange background makes it seem like their destination might be somewhat...hellish.

Seven Questions with Suda 51

We talk to the talented and twisted Goichi Suda about No More Heroes, Project Natal, and his secret crush on Jade Raymond!

Goichi Suda (aka Suda 51), is the CEO of Grasshopper Manufacture and has directed and produced some of the most bizarre and innovative games of the last few years, including No More Heroes, Contact, and Killer7. *GamePro* sat down with the gaming visionary about his latest project, No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle.

1 Could you tell us about some of your inspirations for No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle?

One of the many inspirations for No More Heroes 2 was a Japanese movie about Yakuza called *Battles Without Honor and Humanity*. This movie is in five parts, and No More Heroes 2 was largely based on the second part of the movie, which actually takes place in Hiroshima.

2 Your games—specifically No More Heroes—tend to draw heavily from pop culture such as anime, and as you said, movies. Does this draw from your personal life?

No More Heroes definitely takes from my personal life, my personal inspirations from all of the pop culture that I was influenced by. I was hoping I would be able to get everything out in the original No More Heroes, but I actually found out that there was still some stuff inside me that I needed to express, and that's why I needed a chance to create No More Heroes 2—to really put everything out there this time, including my own personal inspirations.

3 Flower, Sun and Rain and Silver Case are both ports of your earlier, Japan-exclusive games. Is there any chance of seeing any other ports of your earlier work in America, such as Twilight Syndrome?

In the case of Twilight Syndrome, the rights are currently held by (developer) Spike, but we're hoping Spike would consider making a port of Twilight Syndrome onto a new platform.

MR. SUDA 51

4 You have a very unique style, specifically in your dialogue—do you ever feel like anything is lost during U.S. localization?

Once we're translating something from Japanese to English, I check the translation process very closely with the help of Marvelous and Ubisoft to see if everything works and make sure that nothing is lost in translation. For example, when we did the voice recording for No More Heroes 2, we had people from Marvelous and Ubisoft in the studio to help with the recording and to make sure everything was done properly, so I'm honestly not worried that the particularity of the Japanese text will be lost in translation.

5 There's been quite a bit of news surrounding motion-sensitive technology as of late. You already utilized this technology with No More Heroes on the Wii—do you see yourself utilizing Microsoft or Sony's new technology in future projects?

If I can actually work with these new technologies, I would love to try them and see what I can do with both the new technology from Sony and the Natal motion sensor from Microsoft.

6 You debuted the in-game footage of No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle at E3. What were you most excited to see on the showroom floor?

Actually, I'm really looking forward to Need for Speed SHIFT, and I also heard that Uncharted 2: Among Thieves was really, really good. I'm also really looking forward to the new Castlevania from Kojima, as well as Metal Gear Solid: Rising on the Xbox 360. I'm also looking forward to Modern Warfare 2—it looks really great—and of course, Ubisoft's titles such as Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Conviction, which looks really good. I'm really looking forward to Jade Raymond, and I hope I get the chance to meet her (laughs) Actually, they told me Jade Raymond was already married, so I was kind of surprised! (laughs) It was a little disappointing.

7 With Killer 7 you pretty much re-invented the first person shooter genre – are there any other genres that you'd like to tackle, like role playing games, for instance?

Grasshopper's experience is mostly in making action games, but we're not just confined to the action genre. We try to make our games pretty open and we're definitely free to the idea of maybe later, one day in the future you'll get to see Grasshopper work on other genres than just action games.

The 6 Best Second Quests

Here are six games so nice you'll play through them twice!

Super Mario Bros.' Second Quest

Upon defeating King Koopa and (finally) finding Princess Toadstool, our mous-tached hero is offered a new quest, wherein the pushover Goombas are replaced with significantly tougher Buzzy Beetles and Koopa Troopas that are no longer brainless and walk off of ledges to their deaths. The difficulty of these newer stages were rarely surpassed in the Super Mario series, with the exception of the longtime Japan-exclusive sequel, SMB: The Lost Levels.

Punch-Out!!'s Title Defense Mode

Whereas previous games ended with Little Mac atop the virtual boxing world, Punch-Out!! for Wii kept the fight going with its Title Defense Mode. Every character Mac waylaid on his championship journey was back with revenge on their minds and new tricks up their sleeves, including a headgear-clad Glass Joe and a squirrel-assisted Bear Hugger.

Resident Evil 2's B Scenario

In Resident Evil 2's B Scenario, you play as either Leon or Claire (depending on who you played through RE2 as the first time). In addition to your character being different during the second quest, hidden areas, the routes you take, and the choices you made the first time impacting the B game, are all ways Resident Evil 2 made things feel fresh again during its second quest.

Dead Rising's Overtime Mode

One of the central features of Dead Rising was you were always on the clock—particularly the 72-hour countdown before your helicopter escort returned to pick you up from the zombie-infested Williamette Mall. With the pickup not going as planned, finding an alternate method of escape and curing the zombie disease became the central focus of the game's Overtime Mode. Oh, and now the mall is packed with rifle-toting SWAT Teams hunting you. Good luck!

Castlevania: Symphony of the Night's Flipped Castle

Castlevania: Symphony of the Night's take on the traditional second quest may sound second-rate, but as anyone who unlocked the inverted castle at the end of the game will tell you, it transforms the way SotN plays so drastically, it feels like you're playing an entirely new game. Enemies, bosses, and even the color scheme of environments are all changed in the game that many hail as the greatest Castlevania ever.

The Legend of Zelda's Second Quest

When it comes to Nintendo's flagship role-playing series, the company always goes above and beyond what gamers expect. The new, remixed adventure unlocked after defeating Gannon the first time takes the original map and switches things up, moving dungeons and altering their floor plans. Once you take in the depth and added enjoyment of this added adventure, it's easy to see why the term "Second Quest" is synonymous with the new mode.

OMG movies
MOVIES FOR GAMERS

Gladiator (Sapphire Series)

With its big-screen spectacle sequences that bring back memories of classic epics like *Ben-Hur* and *Spartacus*, *Gladiator* seems like a movie that would benefit immensely from Blu-ray—especially the exhilarating arena combat sequences. Director Ridley Scott's brutal 2000 epic tale of revenge hits hi-def as a two-disc set that includes the original theatrical release and 2005 Extended Edition of the film (with DTS-HD Master Audio tracks), along with a second disc that's packed with storyboards, documentaries, deleted scenes, and more extras. *Gladiator* won five Academy Awards: Best Picture, Visual Effects, Costume Design, Sound, and Best Actor for Russell Crowe with his portrayal of Maximus. *Braveheart* will also be released as part of the Sapphire Series on the same day as *Gladiator*. "Are you not entertained?"

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Static

By Sid Shuman

...w Vegas...Fallout: New Vegas...Fallout: New Vegas...• Microsoft's Project Natal is drawing tons of hype despite being a late 2010 product. The tech is promising, and motion-controlled games are hot stuff despite limited interest from the hardcore crowd. Given Natal is unlikely to sell in large quantities as an Xbox 360 add-on, I'm betting Microsoft will re-launch the Xbox 360 (smaller and sleeker, hopefully) in late 2010 and include the Natal. They'll probably endow it with a new name, too—"Xbox Alive," anyone? You probably won't see upgraded graphics, but bundling Natal with the 360 will enable Microsoft to steadily grow the Natal install base over time. Me? I'm still skeptical about Natal. I prefer holding a physical object, and my apartment is too small for flying jump kicks. The voice recognition intrigues, though...• Meanwhile, Sony's so-called "Magic Wand" will benefit from its similarity to the Wii Remote. The "Magic Wand" is a remote controller with a trigger that promises to track precise 1:1 movements in a 3D space using the Eye camera. If nothing else, it'll mean plenty of cheap and easy Wii ports hitting the PS3 in 2010. Fingers crossed for a PS3 Dead Space Extraction...• Is the PS3 becoming the shooter console of choice? With Killzone 2, MAG, and Uncharted 2 all hitting in 2009, the PS3's starting to carry some serious weight in the all-important hardcore shooter genre. Enough to outgun Microsoft's Halo and Gears of War? Maybe not, but the gap is ever narrowing...• DLC on the iPhone is here. Starting with update OS 3, iPhone App Store developers can now add microtransactions into the games themselves. This is going to make some shrewd iPhone publishers very, very rich. I couldn't resist paying another buck or two to download more levels for Peggle or Geo Defense, could you?...• I feel conflicted about the PSP go. Ditching the UMD and gaining 16GB of storage space was smart, but I think Sony missed a huge opportunity by not adding a second analog stick or a touchscreen. I know, I know, it's not a "PSP 2." But ask any PSP owner what they want, and the unanimous answer would be a second analog stick. I still love the Go's ultra-bright screen and tiny size, but I think Sony blew a big chance by not expanding the controls...• Saw that indie sci-fi flick *Moon*. I wouldn't recommend it, despite enjoying Kevin Spacey's performance as a robot. The low-key style and slow pacing were refreshing, but the tale just left me flat in the end. Too much fartsy, not enough artsy...• Join me on Twitter! Go to twitter.com/sidshuman, click "Follow," and enjoy the ride. It's like getting Static all day long...• Homefront...Homefront...Hom...

Pwned this month:
Project Natal
PSP go
Moon

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GAMEPRO'S 200 FALL PREVIEW

The Best of the Best

The 53 best games of Fall 2009 are revealed! *GamePro*'s editors have evaluated early versions of every upcoming game, large and small, then condensed them into this definitive guide. To kick things off, we're highlighting the biggest change of the fall: super-spy Sam Fisher's eye–catching makeover in Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Conviction!

But it doesn't end with 2009. We've also chosen our favorites from the first crop of 2010 games, including exclusive new details on Brink, Aliens vs. Predator, and cult favorite Homefront. Read on for the year in gaming!

TwitterPro

Protip: These Twitter boxes might tell you everything you need to know. Watch this space for off-the-record opinions, then visit Twitter.com and follow the *GamePro* editors!

Twitter.com/Real_GamePro

X360 PC

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Conviction

Desperate times call for desperate man. Meet the new Sam Fisher

A zero-BS Sam Fisher and thrilling storyline look to [illegible] Clancy's Splinter Cell Conviction the best game in [illegible] when it hits store shelves this October. Sam Fisher's approach to finding his daughter's killer is aggressive and hard-hitting, resulting in a faster, more fluid game than any in the series. This spy-action game combines influences from *24*, *Bourne Identity*, and Assassin's Creed. And only *GamePro* has gone hands-on with the new Sam Fisher!.

If you want to know how the game plays, then you came to the right place. Conviction is a new breed of stealth action that fits thematically with prior games in the series, but ditches the constant waiting and hiding for brutal action. This mission is Sam Fisher's worst nightmare, but Conviction plays like a stealth-action dream. And only *GamePro* got to play it!

Sam Fisher's new mission is far more personal. His daughter's death was no accident, and the conspiracy leads back to his corrupt former employers.

The Story So far

During the events of Double Agent, the last game in the series, Fisher's daughter is killed in a drunk-driving incident. Fisher is rendered heartbroken and unstable, turning his back on the black-ops division of Third Echelon and becoming a man with no allegiance.

In Conviction, Fisher's goal is to learn the truth about his daughter's death and whether the tragedy is connected to his former employer Third Echelon. Complicating matters is that Third Echelon is now directed by a corrupt character named Tom Reed, who dresses like Trinity from *The Matrix* and U2's Bono in a leather trench coat. Tom Reed is a man not to be trusted, and that's going by fashion sense alone.

Under Pressure

Conviction wipes the gameplay slate clean, re-imagining Sam Fisher a bit closer to *24*'s Jack Bauer or *Casino Royale*'s James Bond. Case in point are the playable interrogation sequences in which players use brutal beatings to extract answers from a guilty thug. The first level of Conviction takes place in a public bathroom in the south of Italy. This is where you'll gain control of a very angry Sam Fisher, still voiced by hardass Michael Ironside (*Total Recall*, *Terminator Salvation*). Picking up the controller, you'll have an array of contextual melee bashes at your disposal. Choking the thug around the tiled bathroom, you can tap the X button to punch, or push the left thumbstick in any direction with X to execute a throw.

Here you can walk the thug over to a stall door and bash his head into it, denting the wood paneling. The door flies open and a startled potty-goer scurries away. Fisher's throaty growl demands more answers, but the thug is too scared or resilient to show and tell. Walk him over to the recently-used urinal, kick him to his knees, and it takes two downward lounges to complete break the urinal's lip with his head. This primal scene concludes with the criminal caving, guiding you through the next mission as the camera swoops through an overview of a nearby mansion you'll infiltrate next. This brand of seamless storytelling permeates Splinter Cell Conviction—the game never interrupts the action to tell the story.

Stealth Evolved

[illegible] faces

Silent Sam

Looks

In Sam's earlier days with Third Echelon, he wore charcoal commando pants and a black wet suit. Surely, not the most comfortable piece of attire, but he did get a cool pair of company-issued night-vision goggles. This is Sam's signature look.

Play Style

Sam was slow and lumbering in his early days, but he was the stealthiest cat in the business. Sam could pick up and carry enemies, hang from ledges, and even perform "wall splits" in high-ceilinged hallways.

Series Influence

Sam sneakily opened the door for a sequel called Pandora Tomorrow on more consoles, with a bigger budget, better graphics, and more night-vision missions. For years, Splinter Cell was the only serious competition to Metal Gear Solid.

Shaggy Sam

Looks

An early version of Conviction saw Sam in an apparent midlife crisis. This unfinished version of Conviction was delayed and reworked into a far more intriguing game, starting with a more likeable Fisher.

Play Style

"We lost the soul of Splinter Cell," confesses producer Alexandre Parizeau. The old Conviction saw Sam blending into the crowd ala Assassin's Creed, throwing chairs, computer monitors, and even stacks of paper to disorient enemies. To series fans, these changes were a bit of a stretch.

Series Influence

Nothing! This is the Splinter Cell: Conviction you will never play. After a lukewarm reception of the game in 2007, Ubisoft Montreal rebooted the game with a new focus and a new look. A wise decision, we'd say.

New Sam

Looks

An angrier, more determined Sam Fisher searches for his daughter's killer. Cast more as an everyman and a father figure, the new Fisher is more sympathetic and relatable.

Play Style

Faster and deadlier than ever, Fisher can execute multiple enemies at the press of a button, quickly traverse around ledges, and climb buildings. His last known position also serves as a distraction, somewhat like Duke Nukem's Holo Duke or BioShock's Target Dummy.

Series Influence

Nothing yet, but we're more excited for Conviction than any previous Splinter Cell. Fisher is sympathetic, his mission is personal, and he will stop at nothing to make sure that his daughter's killer suffers to his last breath.

CONTINUED ▶

Stealth as a Weapon

As with most stealth games, previous Splinter Cell titles have treated sneaking as a defensive tactic: your goal was to plan attacks, escape enemies and avoid detection. In Splinter Cell: Conviction, however, stealth is transformed into a fast, lethal offensive weapon. The act of being spotted can actually work to your advantage, fooling curious enemies to crowd around your last known position while you skulk in the shadows. Then it's only a matter of leaning out and picking them off, one by one.

Fisher also gains panther-like agility in addition to lethal stealth. His newfound spryness enables him to scurry up the sides of buildings and jump in and out of windows to flank enemies. This level of environmental interaction is new to Splinter Cell, but as in Assassin's Creed, enables you to engage enemies when and where you see fit.

Fisher's default weapon is, as always, a silenced pistol. But in Conviction, he can also pick up enemy weapons, with impressive results. One example is a 12-guage shotgun, which can blast through wood tables to strike the enemies hiding behind them. Picking up enemy weapons is purely optional—Fisher's combat stealth is more than enough for most scenarios—but it adds extra replay value and brings more options to the table.

Conspiracy Theories

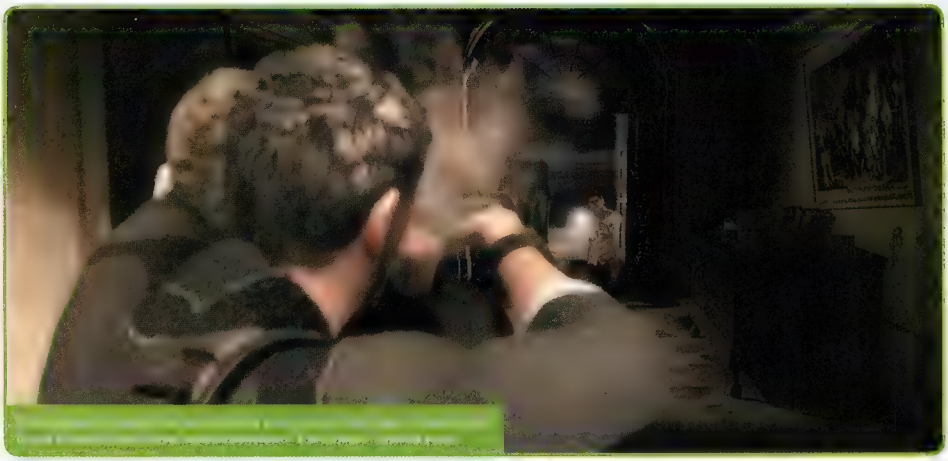
We know that Fisher ultimately pursues the corrupt Third Echelon in Washington D.C., but that's where his story ends, for now. Returning characters, such as radio dispatcher Anna Grimsdottir, may not be the trusted contacts Fisher once thought them to be.

Conviction's producer Alexandre Parizeau did confirm, however, that there will be an online multiplayer mode in Conviction but wouldn't disclose any details. The previous Splinter Cell game included a tantalizing Spies vs. Mercenaries multiplayer mode that fell on its face due to lag and bugs. Here's hoping Ubisoft Montreal resurrects it into a sleek new online experience for Conviction.

Beyond the sleek, deadly stealth-action gameplay, I was most struck by Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Conviction's seamless storytelling. Conviction is dead-set on telling its story in real time, without interruption. And that could be the stealthiest move of all.—**Travis Moses**

on the move

TwitterPro

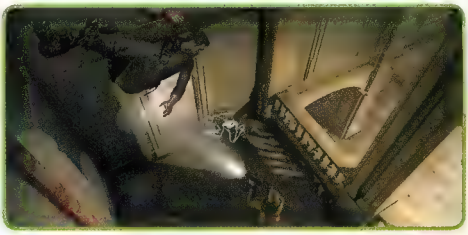


The Four Pillars of Conviction

Stealth action has a new tool box.

1 Mark and Execute

After performing a melee attack, Fisher earns the ability to kill on sight, instantly. Mark and Execute allows you to mark several enemies for death, then tap the Y button to wipe them all out in seconds. You can also mark lightbulbs using Mark and Execute, plunging the area into total blackness.



2 Last Known Position

When Fisher vanishes into the shadows, the world fades to black and white. Your last known position attracts nearby enemies, displaying a ghost-like hologram for reference. Enemies react differently to Sam's last known position. Some will lay down suppressing fire, toss grenades, or walk up to inspect the situation. That's your cue to sneak up from behind for a brutal stealth kill.

3 Predator Stealth

"We are flipping the tables around," says producer Alexandre Parizeau. "Instead of using stealth to hide, you use it to attack." Fisher is faster and more aggressive in Conviction, and can scale buildings like Altair from Assassin's Creed. The result is a tighter, more action-focused game.

4 Seamless Storytelling

As you play, projected movies and text display important story and mission information in and around the world in real time. For example, during the interrogation of the thug in the bathroom, a projected movie plays on the tiled wall that shows a picture of Sarah Fisher's hired killer.

CONTINUED ▶

PS3 owners can rejoice: Uncharted 2 combines a powerful single-player [illegible] with competitive online multiplayer that gives Gears of War a run for its money.

PS3

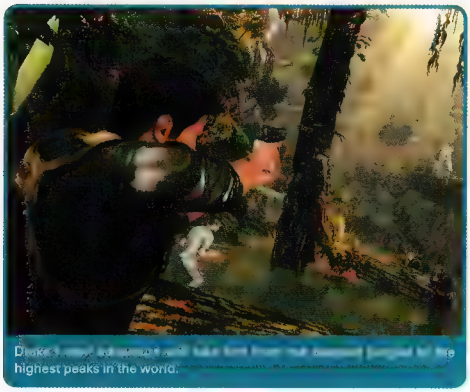
Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

RELEASE DATE : November

Our most-anticipated PS3 game of 2009.

Seven hundred years ago, Marco Polo set sail from China with a fleet of 14 ships, crewed by 600 men. When he arrived in his homeland over a year later, that fleet had shrunk to a single vessel, crewed by a mere 18 people. Marco Polo never detailed what happened to those unlucky 13 ships, but Nathan Drake would really like to know.

Nathan Drake, you'll recall, is a morally flexible treasure hunter and the star of Uncharted: Drake's Fortune, an action-platformer released just as the PS3 was starting to reach its boiling point. With its rich plot, stellar voice cast, and keen balance of puzzle-solving and bloodletting, Uncharted made PS3 owners happy in all the right places. Now Naughty Dog is back, and with them, Nathan Drake.



Drake [illegible] highest peaks in the world.

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves will follow the adventurous thief as he retraces Marco Polo's beleaguered journey to reach the legendary paradise of Shangri-La. It's a lot of ground to cover, but Naughty Dog's promised that we won't see a single loading screen once we've started the game. The seamless world will be powered by a heavily enhanced engine that is said to soak up every bit of the Cell processor's potential. This is evidenced in environments that blow apart, buildings that topple to the ground, and some of the most lifelike human animations we've ever seen.

You can also expect several multiplayer variations, including campaign challenges specifically remixed for three cooperative players. Competitive multiplayer will exist on a slightly larger scale: Team-based deathmatch games will allow up to five players a side, as will Plunder, the one-flag CTF variant in which teams will need to work together to capture a heavy treasure at the center of the map and carry (or throw) it back to base. There may be more online modes unveiled soon, so check GamePro.com for late-breaking updates.

Even if you never played Drake's Fortune, don't let that stop you from getting giddy about Uncharted 2. It's hardcore enough to stand toe-to-toe with Gears of War in a shootout, but the story and the visuals are in a league of their own.—**Dan Tennant**

TwitterPro

[illegible] diehard Gears fiend. I'm not joking when I say that [illegible]

[illegible]

Moses twitter.com/TravisMoses

H[illegible] co-op Survival mode. Get help from your partners before you get choked out!

Fortune Hunters

Naughty Dog's team explains how they tamed the PS3's Cell CPU. Also: new Boosters, the in-game store, and Gold Rush co-op mode.

What's the meaning behind the subtitle "Among Thieves"?

Bruce Straley, game director: The meaning of our subtitle will become clearer as the story unfolds. It alludes to the lawless underworld of smugglers and thieves that Drake inhabits, and the questionable bonds that exist within this treacherous fraternity. [We've] populated the story with a more diverse cast of characters, all of whom reflect different facets of Drake's personality. It's important for us to explore the contradictions in Drake's character. Though he's essentially a criminal, Drake has his own moral fabric. It's not clear that all of his friends and colleagues are cut from the same cloth.

Visually, the original Uncharted was quite impressive. But Uncharted 2 visuals are noticeably improved, so what's the secret?

Christophe Balestra, co-president: We've been able to squeeze out a lot more of the power out of the PS3 by optimizing our SPU code and parceling out more jobs to the SPUs in general. Our Naughty Dog Engine 2.0 simply allows us to do more, do it better, and do it faster: we can display more polygons on screen than we could in Uncharted, environments with even more detail, and our lighting and shadowing systems are more sophisticated.

Another innovation to our technology is allowing Drake, his allies, and all enemies to climb and fight all over detailed moving objects. Take the sequence we debuted on stage at the PlayStation press conference at E3....We put Drake inside of a building that has started to collapse around him in real-time, trapped with enemies who are still out to get him, while you retain full control the whole time!

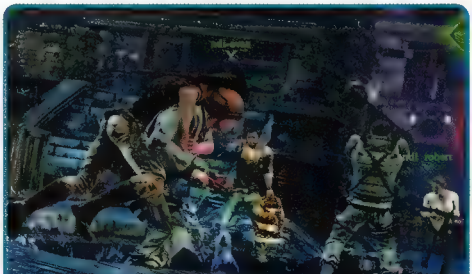
When you play online, will you be unlocking new weapons and "Boosters"?

Justin Richmond, multiplayer designer: Ranking up is a huge part of Uncharted 2's multiplayer. As you earn cash for kills and completing objectives, you are gaining access to more items from the in-game store. Not only are you able to purchase Boosters, but you can buy more skins for your player, upgraded weapons for the co-op game types and even custom taunt animations. We have a large number of Boosters in the game that become unlocked over time and you can choose how and where to spend the money you have earned. Because you earn cash in every online game, as well as from playing the single player campaign, players of all abilities will be able to quickly access new items from the store.

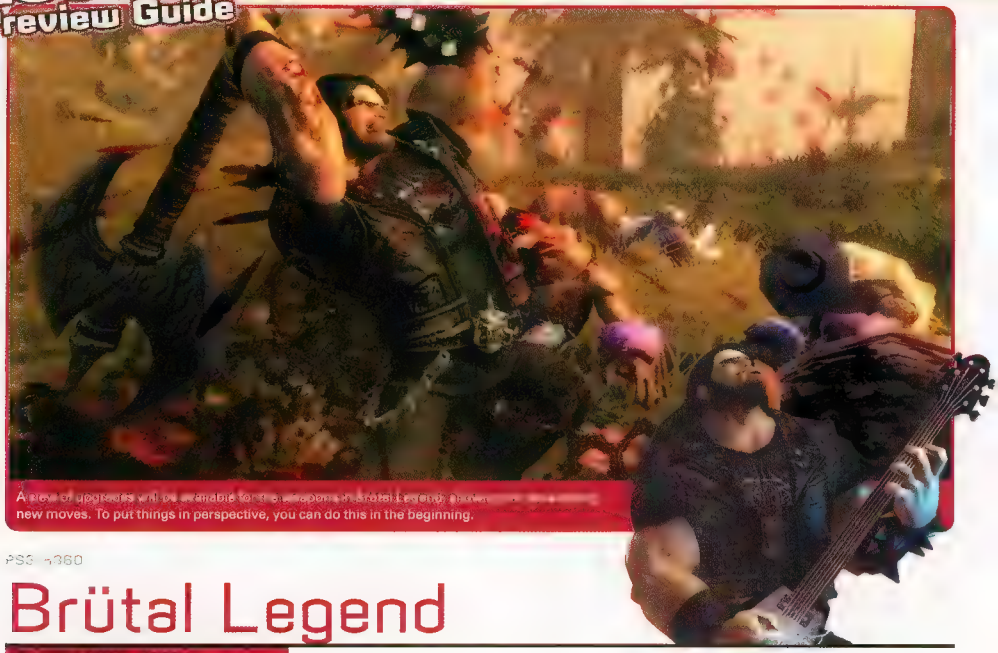
Tell us more about the new Gold Rush mode for multiplayer. Is it cooperative or competitive in nature?

Robert Cogburn, designer: The Gold Rush gametype is a variation on Survival. You will be confronted with wave after wave of increasingly difficult enemies, but in Gold Rush, you will also be trying to retrieve a [randomly placed] treasure and bring it back to a specified capture point. The faster you and your teammates accomplish this, and defeat the enemies that are protecting the treasure, the more points and cash you will be able to earn. Gold Rush is still a cooperative game type, but the competition comes in the form of points. Since carrying the treasure makes you more vulnerable, you'll have to depend on your teammates to protect you from the incoming enemies.

T[illegible] your friends to score [illegible] ons and Boosters!



U[illegible] of War, Halo 3, and Call of Duty 4. Protip: Try using the pistols!



A [illegible] new moves. To put things in perspective, you can do this in the beginning.

PS3 | 360

Brütal Legend

Gore, laughs, and talent: Brütal Legend is a rock epic.

We've seen the game extensively. We've talked to its talented and charismatic creator. We've been keeping track of the stacked roster. We've always known Brütal Legend was going to rock. Now that we've played the game and dug up exclusive new details, we're confident: Brütal Legend *is* rock.

Metal May Cry

We were able to play through a sizable portion of Brütal Legend, and learned new details about the controls and gameplay. Rock roadie Eddie Riggs, voiced by comedy superstar Jack Black, finds himself sent to a mystical world overrun by demons and in need of saving by heavy metal. Luckily, he's gained some powers to aid in that quest.

Eddie's combat repertoire consists of an axe called The Separator, used for up-close hacking and slashing, and Clementine, his trademark guitar that can unleash fire, lightning, and other magic powers. Each weapon is assigned to its own button, as in Devil May Cry and God or War, and you can chain together the attacks. One new attack we've learned about is the Powerslide, in which Eddie does a knee-slide into any nearby enemies, knocking them down. The Powerslide was inspired by the stage moves of Jack Black himself.

Open World Mayhem!

Clementine can also summon some seriously sick spells which can be summoned by playing metal riffs in a Guitar Hero-meets-Ocarina of Time style minigame. One spell, called The Earthshaker, creates an area-clearing attack, while another can summon "The Deuce," a modified hot rod that can plow through enemies like a bouncer through a mosh pit.

The Deuce isn't the only mode of transportation you can take advantage of in Brütal Legend. The open world, besides being populated with side missions, expansive battlefields, and some unforgettable characters voiced by metal and comedy gods (see "Rocking and ROFLing"), is also filled with wild animals that Eddie can ride. Later in the game, a chance encounter with a demon infuses him with the power of flight. Our demo even tasked us with riding a gigantic spider demon down a mountain of skulls. Even if that's the only time we ride it in the entire game, it's too epic not to mention.

Command, Conquer, and Rock On!

While the game's combat will be immediately accessible to anyone who's partaken in Kratos's adventures, there's much more to Brütal Legend's gameplay. Eddie Riggs, is more than just a man who can kill hordes of enemies with his axe and mystical guitar; he's a leader of men.

Within the first hour of gameplay, the game quickly shifts from action-packed one-man brawls to giant, squad-based battles in which Eddie shouts orders to various troop types. So far we've seen Headbangers (metalheads with indestructible craniums), Razor Girls (projectile-shooting lady rockers), and motorcycle-riding medics called Thunderhogs. On the opposite side, we've seen hair-metal, goth, bouncers, and Madonna-inspired armies.

There's also a layer of tower defense and resource deployment at play in the battles, as Eddie's armies are powered by "fan geysers," which can be attacked by enemies and rebuilt by allies. Thus far, we've only learned only seven of twelve army types that the final game will end up featuring, so these epic battles still have plenty of room to surprise us.

The stage time for Brütal Legend is approaching, and the crowd is at a fevered pitch. With God of War III, Dante's Inferno, and Darksiders all due in 2010, this is Brütal Legend's time to shine. It's got the great action prevalent in those titles, but could steal the stage with an unprecedented cast and an epic open world. RAWK!—**Dave Rudden**

TwitterPro

Travis Moses

Sauce-ome!

twitter.com/TravisMoses

Creator of Legends

Inside the mind of Tim Schafer

A [illegible] and as the founder of Double Fine, Tim Schafer has created some of the funniest and most critically acclaimed games of all time, including The Secret of Monkey Island and Grim Fandango. We chatted with Tim recently about his relationship with publishers and his shift to console game development.

Both Brütal Legend and your previous game, Psychonauts, have shifted publishers. How does that affect development?

It didn't change our production at all. We just kept pounding away at the game, just working on taking advantage of whatever extra time that gave us to get the game even more finely honed. You get a little time alone with the game where it really helps the game find itself.

It sounds strange to stress that this is a good thing, but in the case with working with EA Partners and this game, they saw the game in a form where they liked it enough to sign it, and they've always been from the very beginning of the relationship very supportive of the game as it's been envisioned by us.

Brutal Legend is the first project you've worked on that isn't coming to the PC. What are your feelings on that?

For pretty much every [Brütal Legend] article, about three comments down, someone's going "why isn't it coming to PC?" That's been the biggest bummer to me so far, the dissatisfaction of loyal PC gamers. The game itself is something, when you see it, it looks like a console game, it plays like a console game, it really is meant to be played on a console like the Xbox 360 or PS3. I'm sure those things will come down in price so everyone will be airight...I just made every PC gamer in the world mad at me.

I'm also a console player myself. My favorite games of the last ten years have all been on consoles, so I'll defend it as a valid place to be.

How far into development did the idea of having troop-based battles come along?

I would say from the beginning, actually. I really wanted to have a game about being a leader. Being on the battlefield...not just being a solitary warrior, but being a leader of men and women was a big deal from the beginning.

I like the idea of minions. I always wanted minions in a game. I actually tried to get minions in Day of the Tentacle, but it didn't work out. I liked the idea of leaving a minion to work on a puzzle that's really difficult while I go off and try to solve a different one, but I couldn't get that to work.

CONTINUED ▶

Rocking and ROFL-ing

Metal and Comedy Gods Collide!

Brütal Legend's voice cast not only features some of the greatest icons in heavy metal history, it's got some of today's greatest comedians. Here are the masters of comedy and rock that are lending their voices to the game, including a handful of exclusive reveals! Read at your own peril. Slight spoilers abound!

COMEDY

Kyle Gass

Who is he?

Along with Jack Black, Kyle Gass is Tenacious D. The duo has been delivering their own brand of humor-based rock since 1994, and have created a television show and movie about the D's exploits.

How Brütal is he?

Gass has a cameo in Brütal Legend as a mortar cannon operator hidden in the game's expansive open world. He has a set of side missions for Eddie to keep the world safe from the hair metal militia.

Tim Curry

Who is he?

A famed British-born actor known for his dark comedic roles like Dr. Frank N. Furter in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and Mr. Boddy in *Clue*.

How Brütal is he?

Out of everyone, he may be the most Brütal. Curry is voicing Lord Doviculus, a leather-clad demon who seems to the game's main antagonist. The role was previously being considered for rock legend Ronnie James Dio, but Curry ultimately scored the part.

Brian Posehn

Who is he?

Besides his memorable stints as a cast member on *Mr. Show* and *Just Shoot Me*, and *The Sarah Silverman Program*, Posehn has a unique tie to Tim Schafer—the two worked together on the newspaper when they both went to high school.

How Brütal is he?

Posehn will be playing the part of a big game hunter who gives Eddie hunting challenges. The character was described as "a mix between Ted Nugent and Brian Posehn."

Steve Agee

Who is he?

Steve's star has shot pretty high as of late, with a starring role in *The Sarah Silverman Program* as Sarah's video game-obsessed and uncharacteristically gay neighbor.

How Brütal is he?

In the world of Brütal Legend, Agee is the Skullraker, a demon whose head detaches from its body. The Skullraker can then swing his head around on a chain. Tim Schafer described the character as "a giant, dangerous, demonic baby."

METAL

Lemmy Kilmister

Who is he?

As the bassist and singer for Motörhead, Lemmy has been a heavy metal icon for over thirty years. His gravelly voice has been a signature part of the band's iconic sound.

How Brütal is he?

More than you'd expect. Sure, he's playing a pretty epic character in "The Kill Master," a motorcycle driving warrior. But did you know the original designs for Eddie Riggs' character were based on Lemmy? Check out the concept art and tell us you wouldn't want that as a downloadable character skin.

Rob Halford

Who is he?

As the lead singer of the legendary heavy metal band Judas Preist, Rob Halford has one of the most dynamic voices in rock, with a vocal range of four octaves.

How Brütal is he?

Halford plays the surprisingly non-Brütal General Lionwhyte. The leader of the hair-metal militia, Lionwhyte can kill solely through the power of his voice. His presence is felt elsewhere in the game, however, as Eddie's main allies share the surname Halford.

Ozzy Osbourne

Who is he?

He's the Prince of Effing Darkness. As both a frontman for Black Sabbath and in his own musical ventures, Ozzy has proven that he is the king of heavy metal.

How Brütal is he?

Ozzy is just as Brütal in-game as he is in real life, appearing as The Guardian of Metal, a god who can grant new powers and weapons to Eddie.

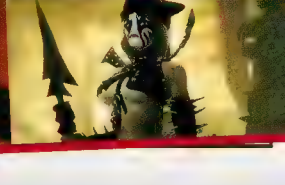
Lita Ford

Who is she?

Ford shot to fame as the lead guitarist of the pioneering all-female rock group The Runaways before scoring many hits as a solo artist.

How Brütal is she?

As Rima, Ford plays the leader of an all-female warrior group. We hope they all share Rima's fashion sensibilities.



New Super Mario Bros Wii

Mario goes four-player co-op.

Forgive us for being a bit taken aback when New Super Mario Bros. Wii was announced. After a world changer in Super Mario Galaxy, it seemed at first all we were getting as a follow-up was a powered-up port of a DS platformer. Once we had our hands-on, however, we learned that this could be the most important and accessible Mario game yet.

Played with the controller held NES-style, New Mario Bros Wii feels very similar to its DS predecessor in terms of controls. But the game smoothly expands the action to fit four players onscreen. Contrary to previous Mario games, when a character dies, they re-enter the stage inside a floating bubble that another character must pop. It's not a cakewalk, though, as too many deaths will put you on the bench for the remainder of the level.

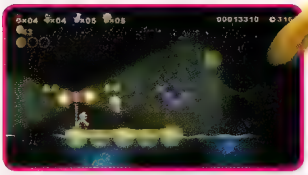
The levels felt equal parts cooperative and competitive, as we'd just as soon steal a power-up from a partner as pop their bubble to get them back in the game. With new power-ups like Helicopter Hats (shake the Wii remote to fly!) and Penguin Suits (slide on your belly and throw ice balls!), as well as the glorious 2D return of Yoshi, we found it extra-difficult to share.

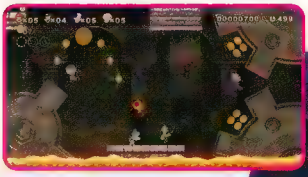
Hopefully, Nintendo can make some small tweaks in the coming months. The "Demo Play," for instance, allows the game to take control from less-experienced players, but we'd love to see more "natural" measures to keep them in the game. An infinite lives difficulty, perhaps? The game has a near-flawless foundation, and is just a few power-ups away from being the biggest and best multiplayer Wii game yet.

—Dave Rudden

The [illegible] second level. Keep up or die!

We can guarantee you'll be racing for the sweet new Helicopter Hat power-up. Thank[illegible] a ride with a partner.





Ice stages have never been our favorites, but the sweet penguin suits might just change our mind.

TwitterPro

3D, shmeedy. Old school Mario games are where the plumber really hit his strike. Four-player co-op sweetens the already delicious deal.

Shaw twitter.com/PatrickShaw

CONTINUED ▶

Alpha Protocol

RELEASE DATE | Late October

Mass Effect meets James Bond

The role-playing genre might be fast approaching the point of oversaturation, but when you see where Obsidian and Sega are coming from with Alpha Protocol, you'll understand this agent's unique mission. Almost every RPG of note has set itself in one of a handful of trite settings, be it olden-times fantasyland, sleek and sterile futurescape, or a decrepit and dilapidated dystopia. Alpha Protocol earns major points from the get-go with its setting, a modern-day world packed to the brim with espionage and intrigue. Like any RPG worth its salt, you can customize Alpha Protocol out the yin-yang, making the character's looks and weapons your own.

We got hands-on with a mission in which the hero, Michael Thorton, infiltrated an enemy compound. Branching dialogue at the beginning of the mission determined whether a sexy Russian spy would be aiding or assaulting you during the quest. While there was plenty of stat-based shenanigans going on in the background (like tweaking weapon levels and keeping track of inventory), Alpha Protocol smartly covers the entire thing with a real-time-feeling shooter scheme similar to Mass Effect 2. If the story can keep up its level of Bourne-esqué smart action over the 20+ hour quest, Alpha Protocol could be a keeper.—**Dave Rudden**

It wouldn't be a spy game without bushy-bearded dictators.

The combat in Alpha Protocol is equal parts Gears of War and Knights of the Old Republic.

TwitterPro

PS3

Assassin's Creed II

RELEASE DATE: November

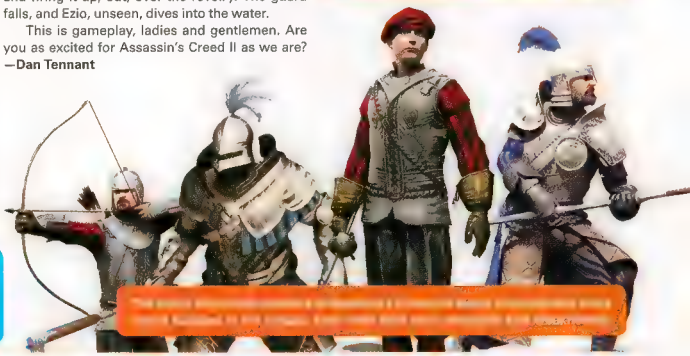
Death from above, a knife in the back.

Ezio Auditore di Ferenze is perched on a parapet. The evening's prey walks down a street several blocks away, a pair of corrupt government officials headed toward a crowd below. With a step into space, he falls, two hundred feet to the pavement, angling toward a hay bale and a soft landing.

To Ezio's chagrin, a guard hears his muffled impact and darts to the bale, sword drawn. He knows something is amiss, but knowing is not enough. A slender knife emerges from the hay too quick for the man to react, and the Renaissance assassin effortlessly trades places with the corpse. The crowd is ebbing toward him now, and Ezio blends with it seamlessly, just another figure in the evening's celebrations. In scant moments he is behind his two targets as they try to push their way past the festivities. He extends both his hands, flexing tendons, and a blade pops from each, like shining fingers in the firelight. Silently, the two men arch their backs, but it's just more dancing to the surrounding crowds, who take no notice.

Then the assassin is running, pushing aside bystanders, heading for the canals. A guard on a nearby roof spots him, shouts, points. Ezio pauses in mid-stride and turns, cocking his wrist blade and firing it up, out, over the revelry. The guard falls, and Ezio, unseen, dives into the water.

This is gameplay, ladies and gentlemen. Are you as excited for Assassin's Creed II as we are? **—Dan Tennant**



TwitterPro

Dave Rudden

I've seen ACII in action, and I can't wait for Ezio's adventure. More enemy types, better parkour, and less predictability! Sign me up!

twitter.com/DaveRudden

PS3 / 360 / PC

Batman: Arkham Asylum

RELEASE DATE: August

A ballet of brutality.

Silence and darkness and a predator in the rafters. The Dark Knight tracks his prey through the walls of Arkham Asylum with his visor's detective mode. His cape extends in a quiet brush of wind, and he falls in slow calm, a black raptor against a blacker ceiling. The camera follows as he lands and springs, weaves with his punches, his almost-delicate takedown of the foe. It's a dance choreographed with crunching bone. It's everything we want Batman to be. **—Dan Tennant**

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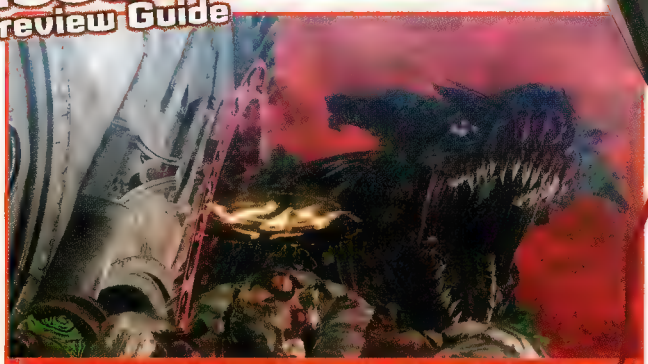


even this ferocious hell-beast.

and riddle their bloated corpses with bullets as they fall.

access to ridiculous combos that fill the screen with visual fireworks.

PS3 360

Bayonetta

Guns, magic, and heaving breasts.

Bayonetta looks, sounds, and plays like it was designed by a group of horny ten-year old sugar addicts. Sex and violence are at the forefront of Sega's latest twitch-speed action game, but as we found out from playing Bayonetta, that's what makes the game so eye catching. The over-the-top characters, the hyper-kinetic action, and the booming sound effects are so insane that it somehow starts to make sense. It's one of those games that doesn't take itself too seriously and we encourage you to see the humor in it.

After all, it stars a vivacious vixen-witch named Bayonetta who wears a body suit made out of her own hair and struts on stilettos with guns built into the heels. But lying beneath the surreal surface is a bona-fide action title in the mold of Devil May Cry (no surprise there considering Hideki Kamiya, acclaimed creator of DMC and Okami, is behind the title). It takes a serious amount of skill to survive the crazy demon enemies and bizarre environments, so don't just think you can laugh your way through to the end. It's a mad experiment that could blow up in our faces, but it if works, and could pay serious dividends for gamers looking for a little pants-tightening action.
—**Tae K. Kim**

How better to rock out than with Harrison and Lennon's signature axes.

PS3 · 360 · PC

The Beatles: Rock Band

RELEASE DATE: [illegible]

The Fab Four in rhythm game heaven.

The Beatles: Rock Band is high on our list for stand-out fall titles. From what we've seen and played so far, you'll be hard-pressed to find a more robust, charming music game offering when it releases in September.

Our guess is that non-music game players who buy The Beatles: Rock Band will want to jump right into some of their favorite tracks without having to go through the story mode, and the game lets you do just that. Each of the 45 songs can be played instantly from the quickplay menu without having to unlock anything. Additionally players can relive the career of The Beatles, which in the game will showcase some of their most memorable performances, such as their debut in the states on the Ed Sullivan Show and their fanatical crowd-filled concert at Shea Stadium in 1965.

The Beatles: Rock Band also adds two extra vocal tracks to the mix, three in total, allowing gamers to fully harmonize some of the Fab Four's greatest tunes. During a particularly long harmony line, each singer can begin filling up a "fab" meter by hitting notes correctly. If these become filled up completely you'll be granted a "4x fab bonus," which quadruples the points received during these vocal segments.—**Andy Burt**

The [illegible]

[illegible]

PS3 · 360 · [illegible]

LEGO Rock Band

RELEASE DATE: [illegible]

Rock out with your blocks out.

Though Harmonix is looking to wow gamers with The Beatles: Rock Band, their backup gig LEGO Rock Band should appeal to a wider audience, notably younger rockers and parents. The game allows for some hilarious LEGO band member customization, and allows younger and more inexperienced gamers to access a "Lego-easy" mode for all instruments, which puts more emphasis on keeping time than hitting correct notes. The game should be a nice introduction to rhythm gaming, while providing the right amount of laughs and Rock Band gameplay to pique the interest of fans of the series.—**Andy Burt**

CONTINUED ▶

Close-range beatdowns to psionic abilities.

Borderlands

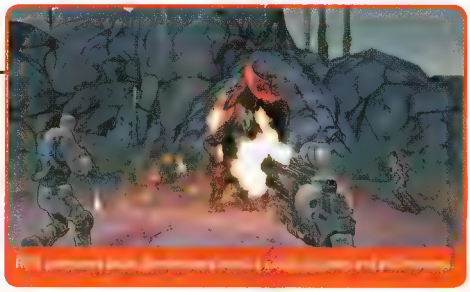
RELEASE DATE October

Loot an alien world with friends.

Once, it was a run-of-the-mill RPG-shooter. Then Gearbox Software decided to completely redo its visual feel to match their original, comic-book concept art. With that "concept style" now giving the game a zest it was lacking, Borderlands has turned into a standout title for this fall. We're too excited for our own good.

While it's not a massively multiplayer game, Borderlands does take place in a massive world, called Pandora. Its drop-in, drop-out cooperative play will let you hitch buggy rides across the planet with up to three friends, and thanks to the four character archetypes, you each should be able to find your niche in the party. You'll definitely be able to find your preferred weapon—its loot-based RPG system will sport over half a million unique drops off enemy corpses. You'll never, ever find the same gun twice.

Think of it as a first-person Diablo; Borderlands campaigns will have dynamically-generated terrain filling out the world between cities, all populated with enemies of every difficulty level. There will even be elite mobs, called "badasses" in the game. It's a fitting name because Borderlands is looking more badass every day.—**Dan Tennant**



TwitterPro

Sidney Shuman: Looks impressed by Borderlands, looks super addictive. The combat is bone-crushing, so this ain't a wimpy MMO game. One to watch for sure.
twitter.com/SidShuman

Travis Moses: More than 750000 weapons?! Count me in for something like that "Rail-gun" from the movie *Eraser*. Or Acme anvil air strikes.
twitter.com/TravisMoses

BioShock 2

RELEASE DATE Tomorrow

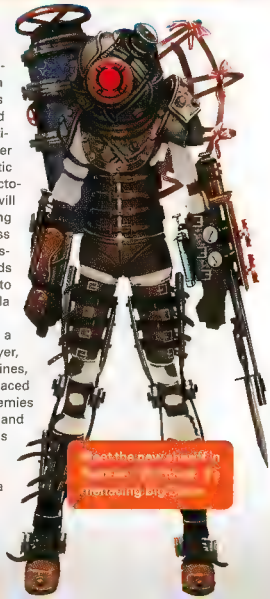
Bioshock 2's Delta Sister Sally Jones [illegible] for the series' [illegible] military-shootouts.

Evolve or die, human.

We know BioShock 2's single-player basics. It's been a decade since the original game. You play as the first Big Daddy, awoken after years of dreamless slumber. There's a Big Sister, a bunch of new Little Sisters, and a big-ass rivet gun. Check, check, and check.

The true mysteries are to be found in BioShock 2's multiplayer mode. Former Unreal Tournament co-developer Digital Extremes, no slouch in the online shooter department, is plopping us in a pre-BioShock world where civil war breaks out as the citizens of Rapture claw for control over the ultimate form of currency: genetic manipulation. Scoring kills and victories in BioShock 2's online modes will reward you with Adam, transforming your character from a working-class stiff into a feral mutant who can discharge electricity. You'll also earn mods to beef up your weapons and Tonics to amplify your offense and defense, à la Call of Duty 4's Perks.

Each multiplayer map works like a microcosm of BioShock's single player, with security turrets, vending machines, and Big Daddies. The combat is fast-paced and ferocious, and you'll attack enemies using combinations of Plasmids and weapons, or stack multiple Plasmids together to multiply their effects. It all looks and sounds great, but when do we get to play? 2K Marin, how about a multiplayer beta?—**Sid Shuman**



Get the new [illegible] in [illegible] thrilling Big [illegible]

[illegible] right in the eye or whatever organ they use...

Wii

Dead Space Extraction

RELEASE DATE: Late 2009

Necromorph sashimi, Wii-style.

Slice 'em, dice 'em, and get the hell out of there! The team behind the brilliantly bloody Dead Space is cooking up a prequel to Isaac Clarke's dismembering romp through the stars, with a little extra zest. Dead Space Extraction is a Wii-exclusive, and it's stretching Nintendo's console to new heights in technology and gore.

Don't be fooled by its rail shooter status. Extraction is full of branching paths and item scavenging, turning it into more of a guided FPS than a bloody Time Crisis clone. The setup fits the Wii exquisitely, since you'll be able to use the Wii Remote to aim at incoming necromorphs, cutting away muscle and sinew until nothing remains but a juicy red broth. Want to use the plasma cutter's horizontal secondary fire? Easy: just rotate the Wii Remote to one side and you'll be gouging flesh with flair.

The lighting effects push the Wii to its hardware limits, painting a chilling world drenched in shadow and dimly flickering light sources. With new weapons like the arc welder and rivet gun, plus melee swiping that will let us cleave aliens chef-style, we can't wait to reboard the infested *Ishimura*. Let's pray that Extraction lives up to its namesake.—**Dan Tennant**

TwitterPro

Maybe the best graphics I've seen on Wii, with dark, atmospheric lighting and levels. Might have to pick up a Wii just for this game.

twitter.com/SidShuman

[illegible] their armor, these alien slugs still have plenty of fight.

PS3, X360, PC

Dark Void

RELEASE DATE: Late 2009

Alien slugs give us nightmares.

While showing off several new levels from its jetpack-fueled title at this year's E3, Airtight Games gave us a peek beneath the exoskeletons of Dark Void's alien enemies. Deep within their artificial caves, where Nicola Tesla's rocket pack can only carry protagonist Will so far, the Watchers come out of their armor, revealing themselves as a metamorphosing race of worm-like lizards. Jetpacks make for hasty retreats, but we'll have to steel ourselves for a fight this fall.—**Dan Tennant**

It's called [illegible] in action.

PS3, X360, PC

Dragon Age: Origins

RELEASE DATE: Late 2009

Sex, violence, and elves.

In BioWare's upcoming fantasy RPG, you take on the role of a Grey Warden helping humanity defend itself from an invading horde of monsters. You can play as one of three basic character classes: rogue, fighter, or mage. One of the most interesting aspects of the game is that your adventure begins with you forming your own origin story through the initial sequences of the game. BioWare plans to shake up old-school fantasy conventions with this game, and have described Dragon Age Origins as a realistic story closer in spirit to George R.R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* than Tolkien. RPG fans, take note.—**George Jones**

CONTINUED ▶

[illegible] game controller that doesn't look like a Fisher-Price toy.

Mash[illegible] Eminem vs "Izzo" by Jay-Z.

DJ Hero

RELEASE DATE [illegible]

Plastic instruments are obsolete.

It was there. Mere inches away from my fingertips. The DJ Hero turntable controller sat temptingly on a tray in a room populated by two developers, one publicist, and a few fellow gaming editors. "If I snatch this and start swinging it wildly," I thought, "I could probably make a run for it." Once I escaped, I'd have in my possession one of the coolest controllers I've ever laid eyes on. The DJ Hero turntable is stylish and compact, and easily wielded by the developer who demonstrated the game. Sure, I'd have no real games to play it on, but this sweet piece of music-gaming machinery is already tempting enough that I'd use it to navigate the Xbox Dashboard.

Fortunately, DJ Hero the game looks to perfectly complement DJ Hero the device. The song list so far is a brilliant mix of old-school hip-hop, new-school pop, rap and techno of all ages, and a sprinkle of rock here and there. The easiest difficult setting even caters to vinyl virgins, with a "Guitar Hero Lite" affair in which you hit three buttons on cue. The higher difficulties create a complex, knob-turning, fader-sliding, platter-spinning experience unlike any music game you've ever played.

Also unlike any music game ever played is the party-friendly atmosphere that permeates DJ Hero. You can set the game to run through a playlist of songs, with players dropping in and out at any time, without the need to pick a new song or fear of failing one or making a musical abomination. Forget waving Wii Remotes or playing with plastic instruments while being stuck to the TV for minutes at a time. DJ Hero will redefine "party games" when it releases on this fall.—**Dave Rudden**

TwitterPro

Andy Burt

Listen all y'all it's a monkey wrench! Um, DJ Hero is something like that.

twitter.com/Andy_Burt

Moses

Sit and spin. Guitar Hero and Rock Band. I'm even more excited for DJ Hero than my first sight of GH. It's harder, better, faster, stronger.

twitter.com/TravisMoses

Def Jam Rapstar

RELEASE DATE Winter 2009

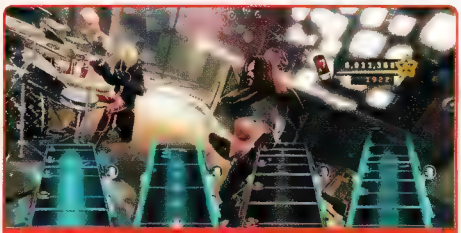
R[illegible] of the old to the hottest hits on the radio right now.

Unleash your inner Kayne.

Taking the Def Jam series from the streets to the studio, Def Jam Rapstar will challenge players to keep up with a wide assortment of fresh beats from rappers like Biggie Smalls, T.I. and Kanye West. With the use of mics, cameras and extra gear, hip-hop enthusiasts can even record their own footage into custom music videos as well as throw down in heated rap battles with their buddies. Word.—**McKinley Noble**

Guitar Hero 5

RELEASE DATE [illegible]



G[illegible] Have three drummers in your band? No problem at all.

Rock's biggest set list ever.

Johnny Cash's scorching "Ring of Fire." "Under Pressure" from David Bowie and Queen. Bob Dylan's iconic "All Along the Watchtower." The Smashing Pumpkins. Tom Petty. Nirvana. Vampire Weekend. And yes, that's right: Rammstein. When it comes right down to it, the songs make the game, and while Rock Band goes LEGO and clings to the Beatles, Guitar Hero 5 is about to unleash a musical whirlwind on the world. That rocks. —**Dan Tennant**

N[illegible]ory includes the Atom[illegible], a new grenade, and a new melee weapon.

Hovering far [illegible] blighted [illegible] Dweller against alien abductors.

PS3 X360 PC

Fallout 3: Mothership Zeta

RELEASE DATE: Available Now

Alien abduction in the wasteland.

In the original Fallout 3, players can find a crashed alien space vessel hidden deep in the Capital Wasteland. In the new Mothership Zeta downloadable content, the aliens return to Earth, and they are pissed. Zeta begins with the player picking up a radio beacon broadcasting a signal in an unrecognizable language, leading to an alien crash site and a new Fallout 3 adventure.

In Mothership Zeta, you'll experience an uncomfortable extraterrestrial abduction first hand, explore the spacecraft that hovers above the blighted surface of Earth, and escape from your alien abductors. Mothership Zeta also features new quest-related perks, alien robots, and a mysterious alien creature that lead producer Jeff Gardiner refused to reveal. Mothership Zeta does not increase the player level cap, but can be played with or without the Broken Steel DLC. If it's anything like the other Fallout 3 expansion packs, it'll be worth the price.—**Travis Moses**

In the origin[illegible] she can be found in the Capital Wasteland. [illegible] this idea with a new E.T.-themed expansion.

G[illegible] ate these impressive graphics.

PS[illegible]

Gran Turismo

RELEASE DATE: [illegible]

No compromises for this PSP racer.

Gran Turismo has handily dominated the racing genre for more than a decade. And for good reason, given the series' obsession over all details great and small. GT on the PSP is no exception, recreating the satisfying depth and sense of speed of its bigger brothers identically even on the PSP's smaller screen. But this is no pared-down port. Gran Turismo will include 800 car models, enabling players to trade their rides with friends via Wi-Fi—a feature you'll need to exploit if you want to eventually collect 'em all.

Like its big brothers, Gran Turismo on the PSP cruises along like a guided missile, running at a firm 60 frames per second. Visually, I'd place the game very close to Gran Turismo 4 on the PS2, with detailed car models and expansive racetracks. But the ultra-fast framerate is most important of all, preserving Gran Turismo's trademark precision. Console-quality sim racing on the PSP is an impressive achievement. Impressive, but not surprising, because this level of polish is a hallmark of developer Polyphony Digital.—**Sid Shuman**

Grand Theft Auto: The Ballad of Gay Tony

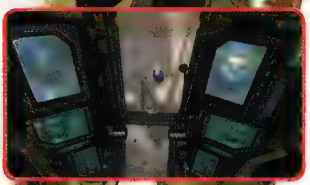
RELEASE DATE: Fall 2009

You'll have a gay old time.

No, you won't be playing as "Gay" Tony Prince, Liberty City's glitzy nightclub king. Rather, in the next episodic expansion to Grand Theft Auto IV, Rockstar is letting players take up the role of Luis Lopez, Gay Tony's personal assistant. A far cry from the grit of The Lost and the Damned's biker gangs, The Ballad of Gay Tony will focus on the glamour-laden nightlife of gaming's most infamous virtual underworld.—**Dan Tennant**

CONTINUED ▶

[illegible] machinegun. ODST's must employ stealthier tactics than Master Chief in this spin-off of Halo 3.



Xbox 360

Halo 3: ODST

RELEASE DATE: Sept.

An expansion evolves into something much more.

Halo fans didn't exactly know what to make when Halo 3: ODST was first announced (then known as "Halo 3: Recon"). It was billed as an expansion pack to the Xbox 360's signature game, Halo 3, but the prequel premise and new lead character raised more questions than answers.

Enter Halo 3: ODST creative director Joseph Staten, who spoke with *GamePro* at length about the scope of ODST, why it's worth a full $60 retail price, and what enhancements it's made to Bungie Studios' flagship series. What can we say? The man makes a good argument.—**Sid Shuman**

You've said that ODST has evolved into a far more ambitious project, to the point where it's beyond a mere expansion pack. In what ways?

When we first announced ODST, we hadn't proven we could execute on two, really ambitious parts of ODST's design. Our team was much, much smaller than a typical Bungie team with a much shorter development timeline, and [we had to create] a big, non-linear, nighttime city of New Mombasa and Firefight. Frankly, we didn't want to over-promise and under-deliver. But that certainly made things more painful when we did execute on the nighttime city and Firefight—as well as a nice, meaty campaign—and then had to change our messaging to say, basically, "Hey, this game can stand on its own two feet! It's big, ambitious, and absolutely worth the cash!"

In the end, even with the confusion, I'm glad we can say this with confidence now rather than making a risky claim last fall. There's a ton of great content inside the ODST package for our fans to enjoy.

Has Bungie learned lessons from other co-op survival modes that you've applied to ODST's new co-op Firefight?

We absolutely love Gears' Horde mode and World at War's Nazi Zombies—and furthermore we love Left 4 Dead, Ghost Recon, Time Splitters and all the other games that have made great "survival" modes over the years. What we've done with Firefight is take that same, ridiculously fun co-op experience and root it firmly in the Halo 3 sandbox. This type of game experience is something our fan community has been demanding for years now. We actually had it on the early feature list for Halo 3 but with so many other huge systems underway it ultimately couldn't fit within the schedule.

ODST Firefight has vehicles, great physics, ruthless enemy behavior. Plus, we've added an evolved version of Halo 3's campaign scoring system as well as its difficulty modifying "skulls," all of which means that Firefight is a unique experience every time you play. Some other survival modes follow a linear progression to a pre-determined end. An ODST Firefight remains dynamic, and will not end, as long as you and your ODST teammates have blood to bleed.

Halo 3: ODST re-introduces the original pistol from Halo. Was this a way to meet fans halfway by re-introducing one of the most beloved weapons in the FPS genre, but in a single-player setting?

The pistol's official name is the M6S, which means it's a sound-suppressed version of Halo 1's M6 magnum. There is, of course, a well-known debate about the balance of the Halo 1 pistol in multiplayer, but I think everyone agrees it was a lot of fun in the campaign because of its ability to zoom-in and drop enemies with well-placed headshots.

When we were thinking of the kinds of weapons an ODST would want in a dangerous, urban environment—what his "go to" weapons would be if he were on his own in a dark and dangerous city—a sound-suppressed version of the pistol seemed like a great choice. And when folks play ODST we think they'll again agree that it's perfectly suited for campaign and Firefight where it's always fun to grease Covenant bastards with a single bullet between the eyes.

TwitterPro

It's not reinventing the FPS but more Halo means ODST is AOK in my book. Really digging the Gears 2 Horde-alike Firefight mode.
twitter.com/DaveRudden

Moses

It's not just me who thinks th Halo been bested by another popular shooter that's av able on all major platforms. What you got, rookie?

with its emphasis on vehicle combat and massive battles.

universe, with returning favorites such as the M6 Pistol from the first Halo.

NEW!

Halo: Reach

RELEASE DATE Fall 2010

"We've got Spartans on the ground, sir."

Halo: Reach is Bungie Studios' newly announced prequel to Halo: Combat Evolved. Few hard details are known about the game, but it's expected to chronicle the events of the paperback novel *Halo: Fall of Reach*, in which the first Spartan recruits are trained from childhood up to their first encounter against the growing threat of the Covenant. Like Halo 3 before it, Reach will launch with an online multiplayer beta sometime in early 2010. If you buy Halo 3: ODST, you'll automatically get an invite to Halo: Reach's beta. That perk alone makes ODST a hot commodity.

Halo 3: ODST's creative director Joseph Staten draws comparisons between the upcoming Halo: Reach multiplayer beta and 2006's Halo 3 beta. "We shipped a ton of content with the [Halo 3] beta and gave players a fairly robust experience," Staten says, hinting of similar things to come with Reach. "If you want to play Halo: Reach early," Staten adds, "you'll want to be in the beta and you'll need ODST to access it. In fact, you'll eventually launch the Reach beta directly from the ODST main menu."—**Sid Shuman**

are numerous. Not for long, though. The Covenant are coming.

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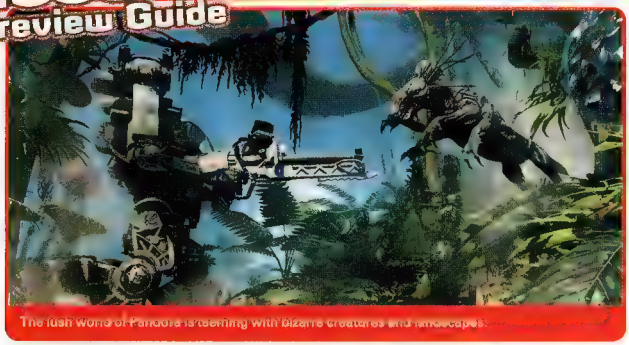


The lush world of Pandora is teeming with bizarre creatures and landscapes.

game will make use of them as well.

PS3 • 360 • DS • PSP • PC

James Cameron's Avatar

Seek out strange new life, and kill it.

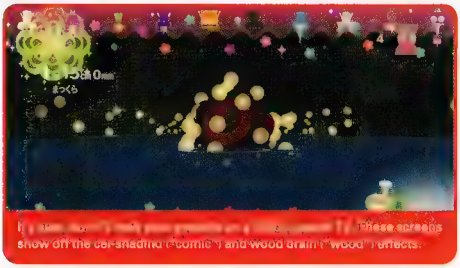
A prequel of sorts to James Cameron's super-hyped movie, Avatar is set in the 22nd century on a moon called Pandora. The human race tries to colonize the planetoid, which is inhabited by ten-foot tall humanoid creatures known as the Na'vi. In order to inhabit the planet, though, human scientists must genetically engineer human/Na'vi hybrids known as Avatars, then control them with brain waves. Naturally, a massive war breaks out between the two civilizations. The film promises to marry epic sci-fi war sequences with a thought-provoking tale that critiques mankind's history of oppressing less advanced civilizations.

Aside from indicating that the game will be a stereoscopic 3D title, meaning the images will pop right off your screen when you're wearing the slick new 3D glasses, Ubisoft has been tight-lipped concerning Avatar. The company was kind enough to hook *GamePro* up with a few exclusive screen shots, however.—**George Jones**

TwitterPro

Avatar's use of 3D is said to be groundbreaking on film, so I'm eager to see how the game implements it. Please, Ubisoft, tell me more!

Shuman twitter.com/SidShuman



show off the cel-shading ("comic") and wood grain ("wood") effects.

PS3

Katamari Forever

Keep rollin', rollin', rollin', rollin'.

With its sparkling 1080p graphics, this PS3 exclusive is certainly the best-looking Katamari Damacy title ever released. It could also come closest to recapturing the magic of the first game, long considered the series' high point. This time, you're rolling through 30-some levels that are decked out in dazzlingly psychedelic art styles: cel-shading, wood grain, and colored pencil to name a few. In some levels, you'll roll to return color to a monochrome landscape ala Flower. In others, you'll soak up water and roll your ball in order to grow lush gardens. It's a feast for the senses. —**McKinley Noble**

DS

Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks

Meet Link's killer train.

Spirit Tracks is looking to innovate on a few different levels. For one, you'll be able to control the heavily armored Phantom Knight, a buddy character who can help Link solve puzzles and reach inaccessible areas. For example, Link can ride the Phantom Knight through a sea of lava to avoid green leotard burns. Meanwhile, the new Train Challenges are extremely engaging and intense. You'll blast enemies with a giant cannon mounted on the engine while balancing your train speed, switching tracks, and avoiding oncoming train traffic. We never envisioned Link as a train conductor, but when Nintendo speaks, we listen.—**Andy Burt**

Left 4 Dead 2 is juicier and nastier compared to the original game.

Left 4 Dead 2

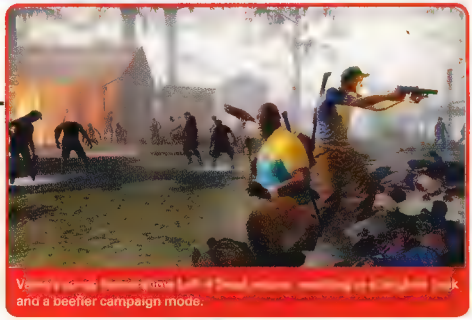
RECORDS WRITE [illegible]

Mardi Gras is cancelled. Instead, zombies!

The original Left 4 Dead took four players, a fistful of guns, and the internet, then threw the whole shebang into a mess of zombies. This innovative cooperative FPS found its following on Xbox Live thanks to its quirky team play, and now Valve is preparing a sequel that expands the gameplay and stretches a bloody trail from Savannah, Georgia to New Orleans.

As always, helping your teammates survive is essential to the group's overall success as you plunge deep into the domain of the "infected." Cooperation is important, but firepower still rules. I tried out a new silenced assault rifle, then wielded a frying pan and a fire axe against dozens of shrieking ghouls. In a spicy twist, firearms can now be upgraded with incendiary rounds that are scattered randomly throughout the levels. The variety extends to the zombie hordes, which now show off far more interesting designs (my favorite being the Hazmat suit-clad fellow, who is immune to fire). There's more gore, too, with gunshots producing juicier wounds and lopped-off limbs. Not to sound like a serial killer, but the violence here feels more substantial than in the first game.

Some fans are displeased that Left 4 Dead 2 isn't a downloadable content pack for the first L4D, or feel slighted by the brighter style and new survivors. To those fans, I say this: Left 4 Dead 2 is shaping up to be the better game. You'll find out soon enough.—**Sid Shuman**



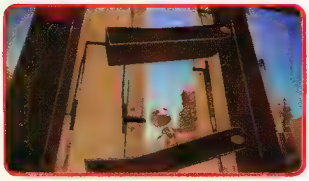
Valve's [illegible] now Left 4 Dead [illegible] and a beefier campaign mode.

The Hazmat zombie [illegible] even more threatening.

TwitterPro

[illegible] moves, better weapons, and a scary new locale. I want Left 4 Dead 2 right now!

Dave Rudden twitter.com/DaveRudden



Create and share via Wi-Fi on the PSP.

PSP

LittleBigPlanet PSP

[illegible]

Sackboy swings onto the PSP.

LittleBigPlanet's simple 2D platformer gameplay seems at home on the PSP with few compromises to the original's visual detail and controls. While objects are built with fewer polygons—Sackboy looks a *little* pointy—the changes will enable users to build the biggest, most complex levels possible on the PSP hardware. The game promises to bring all the physics, all the customization, and all the level editing features of the original, with brand-new story levels. That's our kind of port. With a little luck, and Sackboy's pluck, LittleBigPlanet will be revitalized with this promising handheld edition.—**Sid Shuman**

CONTINUED ▶

Modern Warfare [illegible] of 2009, [illegible] of Duty 4 left off. Expect new weapon mods, realistic firearm handling, and nimble hand-to-hand knife fights.

PS3, X360, PC

Modern Warfare 2

RELEASE DATE: November

Easily the hottest shooter of 2009.

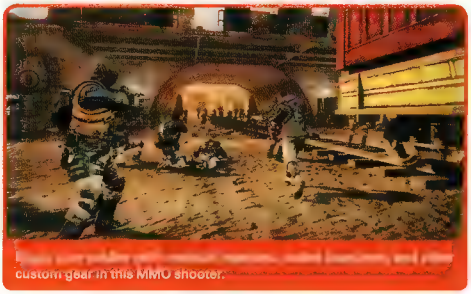
Call of Duty is a phenomenon. Climbing to the tops of ranking charts, it has rivaled Halo 3's dominion over Xbox Live ever since. Today, there are two games keeping Master Chief from feeling safe in the top spot, and they're both Call of Duty titles.

Small wonder, then, that some analysts are predicting Modern Warfare 2, Infinity Ward's sequel to Call of Duty 4, will shatter records left and right when it's released this November. There's no guarantee, of course, but there sure is plenty of reason to expect a good showing. Modern Warfare 2 is leaping ahead of its predecessor in every conceivable way.

The most obvious shift from the old game to the new comes in terms of scenery. The arid deserts of the first title have been replaced by ice-white mountainsides and freezing valleys. Snow pools into eddies on the ground before being whisked away by wind so biting, you can almost feel the chill. Sure, the original Modern Warfare was as pretty as they came back in 2007, but the sequel's visuals have been perfected. They're almost scarily immersive.

That immersion won't stop at graphics, either. Entrances and exits to and from combat situations in the game's single-player campaign have been made far more interactive. Infinity Ward showed off a sequence from early in the game, in which you'll need to climb up the sheer face of an ice wall, digging in ice axes to reach the top. Once the mission is complete, extraction will come in the form of a pair of snowmobiles, which you'll need to ride down the mountain slopes, firing at your pursuers all the while.

In keeping with the CoD series, Modern Warfare 2's single player is just half the story. Unfortunately, the multiplayer side is nonexistent, but we know Infinity Ward is working furiously on perfecting it. They did let slip that co-op fans will have something to look forward to: the game will feature non-campaign "Special Forces" missions designed for two-player online cooperative play. And no, there won't be an MMO-like subscription fee, so stop asking.—**Dan Tennant**



custom gear in this MMO shooter.

like this excursion to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

MAG

Global war with 256 players.

We've seen this emphasis on huge numbers before, and it rarely ends well. But MAG (once short for "Massive Action Shooter") is getting close to figuring out the enigma of the MMO shooter. If you love Battlefield or Call of Duty, stay frosty for MAG.

Supporting 256 players in one match requires compromises, but based on my hands-on experiences, MAG may strike a winning balance. I played in a live 256-player match, and it felt more responsive and aggressive than other big online shooters such as Battlefield 2 and Frontlines. I was most impressed by the smooth, quick feel of MAG's shooter controls, which instantly reminded me of Modern Warfare. MAG strongly focuses on Call of Duty-style infantry play, but there are drivable vehicles such as APCs for troop transport.

MAG's graphics aren't awe-inspiring, but that's to be expected in a game of this scope. But the game looks clean and sharp with its realistic lighting and huge draw distances— a huge accomplishment in and of itself for 256-player battles. The storyline is set in a post-World War III era, with private militaries monopolizing international conflict. You compete online in a persistent "Shadow War" with other companies for control of lucrative government contracts. Win a contract and your team might gain enhanced armor or weapons. Lose the contract later and you'll lose the perks, so it pays to keep fighting.

MAG is laser-focused on online play, so beyond some training you won't find any single-player modes. But there's plenty to do online, with optional side-quests to earn XP, plenty of collectible gear, and some of the tightest FPS controls on the PS3.—**Sid Shuman**

TwitterPro

Patrick Shaw

Modern Warfare 2's icy-hot Cliffhanger level reminds me of Arnie's shootout at the beginning of *True Lies*. Only with a higher body count.

twitter.com/PatrickShaw

TwitterPro

Andy Burt

I always wanted to be a military general. Actually that's a lie, but I love giving commands to my grunts in MAG.

twitter.com/Andy_Burt

CONTINUED ▶

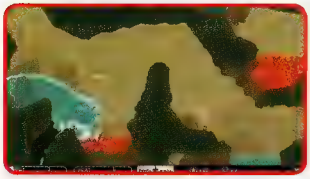
PS3, X360, PSP, PC, Phone

Need for Speed SHIFT

Much-needed racing revival.

While arcade racers can look forward to Need for Speed: Nitro this fall, it's the serious drivers that are in for the real treat. The keyword is realism in Need for Speed SHIFT, where you are not your car, but the driver of your car. That means you move your in-game head to check the rear-view mirror, and your vision can be affected by G-forces in hairpin turns. Hardcore doesn't begin to describe it.—**Dan Tennant**

SHIFT's highest difficulty levels require a wheel and foot pedals for play.



PixelJunk is a dual-stick shooter with a twist. In Shooter, you're fighting fire with water.

PS3

PixelJunk Shooter

GamePro's most-anticipated PSN game.

The creators of PixelJunk Monsters and PixelJunk Eden have a new addiction in store. Like its predecessors, PixelJunk Shooter is a retro-styled 2D game jazzed up with modern gameplay design choices, HD graphics, and a funky soundtrack. You pilot a capsule-like ship through the bowels of the earth while dodging rivers of lava, blasting giant bats, and evading laser fire. As you progress, you'll rescue tiny marooned explorers using a retractable winch. If you're thinking this sounds like a remix of Choplifter and Lode Runner, you'd be onto something.

At times, you'll be blocked by red-hot magma flows that will overload your vessel's heat shields. This is where it gets fun: using your rocket launcher, you can punch holes in the surrounding crust to divert underground rivers, solidifying the magma into harmless rock. At other times you'll need to soak up water using a massive sponge-like orb, then drop the water over the hotspot like a fire-fighting helicopter. It's fun, fresh, and utterly bizarre. I wouldn't expect anything less from Q-Games.—**Sid Shuman**

Don't expect these creatures to pick up pet food.

Wii

Rabbids Go Home

Cute, cracked-out, and irresistible.

I approached Rabbids Go Home with low expectations. But by the time I finished playing the game, the smile on my face was proof enough that it could be the best platformer of 2009. The best way to describe Rabbids Go Home is as a mix of Katamari Damacy, Tony Hawk, and Crash Bandicoot (back when all three series were good). You control a shopping-cart-pushing Rabbid whose main objective is to collect enough garbage, by any means necessary (i.e. scaring people's clothes off), in order to climb to the moon.

There are also race missions in which you chase a fast-moving object—in the case of the level I played, it was a spry bovine. One of the coolest features in the game was the "In Ze Wiimote" mode in which you can customize your Rabbid character and subject him to torture while he's inside an in-screen Wii Remote. Shake it, and he'll bounce off the wall; hit the trigger, and it'll toss him around. Like everything about this game, the mode is insane but unforgettably fun.—**Dave Rudden**

TwitterPro

Not a Rabbids fan myself, but this one looks so insane I'll have to give it a try. Think Katamari meets Mario Kart, but on crack. Very cool.

twitter.com/SidShuman

PS3

Ratchet & Clank: A Crack in Time

RELEASE DATE: Fall 2009

Did we mention rocket boots?

A Crack in Time expands upon the series' explosive action with more combat variety and time-travel puzzles. The explosive action runs at a blistering 60 frames per second, with gorgeous environments that shatter under the barrage of your high-powered weapons.

Of course, there are new guns-a-plenty. I was most impressed by the Sonic Erupter, a blowfish-looking creature that belches out a deafening mating call to pulverize rock and bone. You'll also find Cryomines, ice grenades that freeze enemies in place; the Plasma Striker, a sniper rifle-style weapon that illuminates enemy weak spots; and the Omni-Soaker, a watergun-like weapon that can suck in any fluid and propel it back out again. Your target: the Agorians, demonic-looking aliens who ride massive beasts into battle.

The loveable robo-sidekick Clank also returns in a series of quirky sequences that vaguely reminded me of Braid's time-shifting puzzles. The title's temporal references aren't based on Clank's puzzles alone, and time travel will indeed factor into the central storyline. How? Only Insomniac knows, but fingers crossed for dinosaurs.—**Sid Shuman**

Ratchet's packing new gear and new graphics in a quest that picks up after Tools of Destruction.

The Saboteur is rated M for Mature. "Hello, ladies."

PS3 X360 PC

The Saboteur

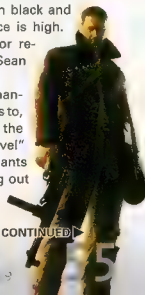
RELEASE DATE: [illegible]

Sex shops and Nazis.

The exquisite city of Paris is heavily occupied by German Nazi forces. The city is lifeless and French citizens have lost the "Will to Fight," a key mechanic in the game that affects not only the visual style but the active presence of French Resistance fighters.

In The Saboteur, players fight in an open world of primary mission objectives that progress the main storyline and optional side missions. Sean, the main character, bombs Nazi war factories and infiltrates military bases in black and white districts where Nazi presence is high. When the district is liberated, color returns and French citizens will help Sean fight back.

When the heat gets too much to handle, players can hide Sean in brothels to, um..."relieve his tension" and return the Grand Theft Auto-style "Wanted level" to a neutral state. Sean zips up his pants and lights a cigarette after stepping out of sex shops. He is quite the dashing lad after all.—**Travis Moses**



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Ag[illegible] and fo[illegible]

Singularity

[illegible]

Melt faces with rapid-aging powers.

Hands-on with Activision's newest first-person shooter, Singularity, reveals a crucial detail: the developers at Raven Software love the atmosphere and play style of BioShock so much you'll be immediately reminded of Rapture's Art Deco color palette and telekinesis plasmid. On the other hand, it's a compliment that Singularity fits the mold of BioShock's innovative and immersive gameplay, and sets itself apart with an advanced time manipulation device that allows you to age objects, and even people, backwards or forward in time.

In Singularity, the left-handed time manipulation glove has many uses: you can age broken crates backwards in time to when they were full of precious ammo; stop missiles in midair to rewind them back from where they were fired; and even turn people to dust by aging them decades in a nanosecond. The time-manipulation effects look flashy, and add a new wrinkle to solving environmental puzzles and winning firefights against the resistance. Get sucked in to Singularity this September and you might be asking yourself, "When the hell am I?"—**Travis Moses**

Sing[illegible]

Silent Hill: Shattered Memories

[illegible]

Shape your own nightmare.

Konami's signature horror franchise lost some steam with the last handful of sequels, but Silent Hill: Shattered Memories reinvigorates it with fresh ideas applied to the game's trademark psychological horror. Shattered Memories is a re-imagining of the original Silent Hill game for the PSOne. It still begins with a car crash and the protagonist's search for his daughter, but everything else—from the faceless, emaciated Gollum-like freaks you encounter to the combat and exploration—has been created from scratch. Shattered Memories amplifies the immersion by eliminating anything that would disrupt the oppressive mood. Instead of reading text boxes, you'll find notes, clues, and signs in the environments and read the information right off the objects themselves. And rather than fiddling with an on-screen menu system, your character has an iPhone-like gadget that's equipped with a map and camera.

The most impressive aspect of Shattered Memories is the "psyche profile" you build for your character. You get your first taste of this early on when a psychiatrist makes you fill out a questionnaire loaded with questions like "Do you enjoy role-playing during sex?" and "Do you often have a drink in order to relax?" How you react in situations molds everything from how enemies and characters look to the specific paths you take on your blood-curdling journey.—**Patrick Shaw**

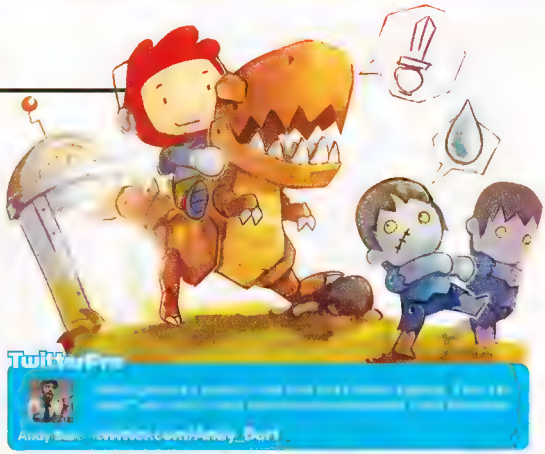
The [illegible] Memories will determine [illegible] sive aggressors look like.

Scribblenauts

Mere words aren't enough.

I could sit here and try to describe the genius that is Scribblenauts but it wouldn't do the game's irreverent humor and brilliant gameplay justice. The premise is dead simple—navigate a series of levels in order to collect star pieces—but Scribblenauts defies description thanks to its vast in-game dictionary. It houses tens of thousands of objects, all of which can be used and manipulated however you want. Where other games force you to jump (boring!), Scribblenauts lets you summon a jetpack, a pogo-stick, a fighter jet, a trampoline, a T-Rex, a pack of zombies, a UFO, and tons more.

The possibilities are virtually endless and discovering unique solutions to the puzzles will keep gamers engaged for a long time. Scribblenauts also has a wonderful sense of whimsical charm; the crude colored pencil art-style imbues the visuals with a goofy but loveable vibe and it empowers you to be as creative and zany as you want. It doesn't have the name recognition or star power of high profile titles like God of War III and Halo 3: ODST, but Scribblenauts deserves a place on every gamer's wishlist. You have my word on it.—**Tae K. Kim**



Spyborgs

Spyborgs is no longer [illegible] of this better.

Ratchet vets make co-op brawler.

Exclusive to the Nintendo Wii, Capcom's Spyborgs is a "fun-times" cooperative action brawler that allows players to choose between a threesome of cybernetic superheroes, each with their own exceptional abilities. There's Stinger, the leader of the group, Clandestine, the agile assassin, and Bouncer, the hale-and-hearty tank.

Aside from the co-op robot bashing and vivid new graphics, it's the boss battles that most stand out in Spyborgs. In classic Capcom style, the bosses are massive, have multiple phases, and carry more firepower than all of the National Rifle Association. Unveiled here is the second boss, Cult, who must be defeated on foot before he commandeers a massive spider-legged tank.—**Travis Moses**

'Splosion Man

We've needs to [illegible] new heights!

Off-the-wall DLC.

Ignore those other platformers with their ridiculous jumping mechanics. Real heroes don't jump; they blow themselves apart! When we first heard about the man made out of pure explosion, running amok in a nuclear laboratory, we knew we'd found an Xbox Live Arcade game we just had to play. 'Splosion Man is an April Fools' joke gone wonderfully right: a 2.5D platformer with four-player co-op, from the folks behind The Maw. Kaboom! —**Dan Tennant**

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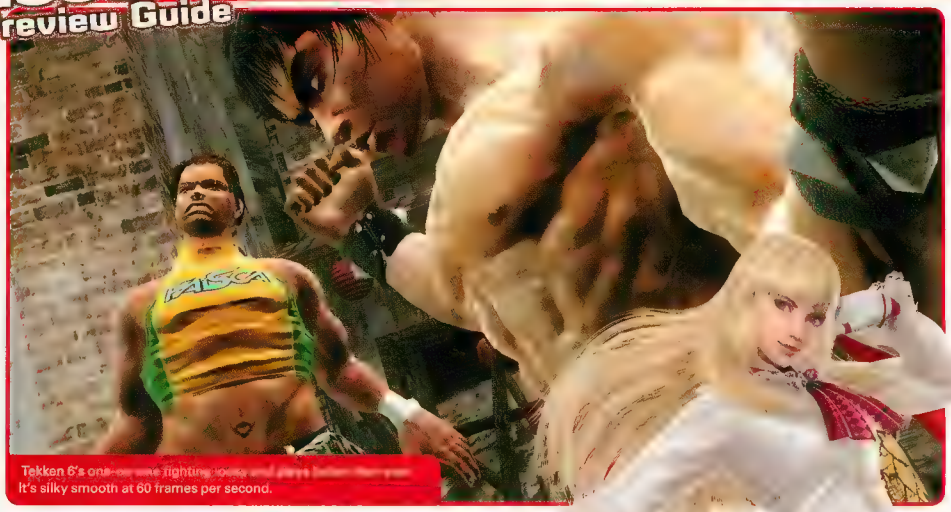


Tekken 6's one-on-one fighting looks and plays better than ever. It's silky smooth at 60 frames per second.

PS3, X360

Tekken 6

Better, faster, stronger, more.

Namco Bandai is cutting the fat with Tekken 6, creating a sleeker, harder-hitting fighter that plays like fan-favorite Tekken 5 on steroids and Red Bull. The one-on-one fights are intense and crushing—big strikes hit with the force of a dump truck going 80 mph, as sparks and debris swirl around the screen. The visuals are a delight on both the PS3 and Xbox 360, with a 720p native resolution and motion blur running at a steady 60 frames per second.

As in Soul Calibur IV, Tekken 6 offers enhanced character customization that ranks among the best in the fighting genre. In Tekken 6, you can obsessively tweak your fighter's hair styles, clothing, and accessories to mimic a pop culture icon (bonus geek points to whoever makes The Joker first). Online Versus battles will also see a massive overhaul, though specifics remain hazy for now. Overall, Tekken 6 is shaping up to be a fine one-on-one 3D fighter and my fingertips are quivering in anticipation, as Tekken 5 lunchtime battles remain a cherished *GamePro* tradition.

In bigger news, Namco is introducing a new co-op brawler mode called "Scenario," a nod to the bonus Tekken Force in past games. In Scenario, two players play cooperatively online or offline, beating down hordes of enemy robots and soldiers, collecting XP to buy new abilities, and grabbing gold to purchase new items for Versus play. Scenario works a bit like Soul Calibur IV's Tower of Souls, in that you're grinding for items and skills. But Tekken 6's co-op combat Scenarios are far more diverse: in one, I controlled a massive, screen-filling robot that shot rockets and lasers at a mob of ninjas. Name one other fighting game that gives you *that*!—**Sid Shuman**

TwitterPro

Tae Kim

When this game comes out, I'm going on vacation so I don't have to hear our dev guys scream like little girls over it.

twitter.com/TaelurKim

PSP

Soul Calibur: Broken Destiny

Kratos makes a triumphant return on the PSP.

At a glance, Broken Destiny almost passes for Soul Calibur IV on the PS3 or Xbox 360—mighty high praise for a PSP game. The character lineup doesn't disappoint, either, hovering around 30 playable warriors. But you won't find Yoda or V-Daddy here as selectable characters. Instead, in an epic feat of fan service, you'll find Kratos from God of War. With his twirling Blades of Chaos and godly items, Kratos looks like a blast to control in a one-on-one setting. Aside from the celebrity appearance, Broken Destiny looks and feels comparable to Soul Calibur IV on the consoles, tight controls, character customization, and all. This is righteous news.—**Sid Shuman**

Broken Destiny looks fast and smooth, just like Soul Calibur IV, and Kratos blends nicely into the cast of freaks and geeks.

Tekken 6's Scenario mode adds co-op brawling, with gains of unlockable skills, loot, and costumes. And guns, lots of guns.

The graphics make the 3D fighting genre to an entirely new level. When you see Tekken 6 in motion (GamePro.com!), you'll understand.

Tekken 6's Scenario stages have far higher production [illegible] replay value thanks to online co-op. In this Scenario level, I stomped my way to victory with this enormous mech.

PSP

Tekken 6 (PSP)

Get ready for the PSP battle!

Early glimpses of Tekken 6 on the PSP show serious promise. Based on the same engine used in the console versions, Tekken 6 on the PSP will get exclusive new stages, character costumes, and unlockable extras (we're hoping for the return of Tekken Bowling and Tekken Ball). As long as the gameplay remains identical to the console versions, this remix is likely to be a winner. The track record here is encouraging, given that Tekken 5 on the PSP was virtually indistinguishable from its console brethren. **—Sid Shuman**

Tekken 6 for PSP gets new stages, many unlockable goodies, and Wi-Fi multiplayer. But what about Tekken Bowling?

M[illegible] famous in the original Tony Hawk's Pro Skater.

The half-pipe stages allow for close-ups of your skater, along with special effects when you pull off sick tricks.

Tony Hawk: RIDE

Hawk's biggest stunt yet: no buttons!

After nine Tony Hawk games, including two or three clunkers, Activision is moving away from series originator Neversoft, handing the reins to new developer Robomodo. In turn, Robomodo is bringing about the biggest change in ten years of Tony Hawk video games: a life-sized skateboard controller.

I mounted the mysterious controller recently, and as a stuck-in-the-mud Tony Hawk veteran, I may not have been the best candidate to test-drive Ride. The controller consists of accelerometers that enablemove your onscreen skater to move left or right depending on how you shift the board, or ollie when you pop up the back of the board. The controller also features built-in sensors that cause your character to perform grab tricks when you wave your hand over them.

I'm terrible at real skateboarding (so says a dusty deck in my broom closet), so applying my non-existent skills to a game that demands balance and coordination led to a mess. I couldn't reach low enough to make grabs, nor were my lower body reflexes fast enough to do kickflips. Let me stress that I'm in shape; I just don't have the skateboarding skill set. Hopefully the final version won't require such skating chops, as I'd hate to miss out on a gorgeous game that introduces this intriguing new method of control.—**Dave Rudden**

With the amount of technology crammed inside it, the Tony Hawk Ride skateboard is surprisingly well-designed. Look for this game to start a cottage industry for gaming-related deck stickers.

WET

Acrobatic violence à la *Kill Bill*.

Imagine if Bethesda hired a Hollywood wireworks team and got Quentin Tarantino to direct them. WET feels like an action movie set in the 1970s, with current-day hottie Eliza Dushku of Dollhouse fame voicing the main character. What's really got us thirsty for more, though, is the over-the-top presentation of an acrobatic assassin that can attack while doing anything—from sliding down ladders to wall-running across the sides of moving semi trailers.—**Dan Tennant**

Yeah, this is a gameplay shot. Spraying bullets while leaping from car to car is WET's forte.

Movies 4 Gamers

Video games alone aren't enough, dammit. If we're going to shake this worldwide funk, we're going to have to bring out the big guns. Here's what we'll be watching this fall!

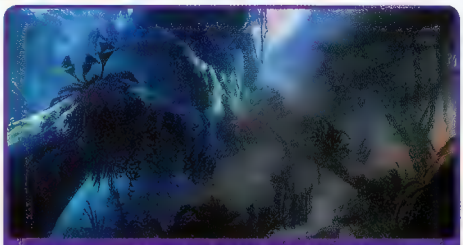
The aliens in *District 9* [illegible] ey get it? What do *you* think?

District 9

RELEASE DATE : Late 2009

Earth: Love it or leave it.

How far would you go to escape oppression? *District 9* follows a group of extraterrestrial refugees who, after escaping to Earth for a new beginning, find themselves demoralized and exploited by Multi-National United: a sinister conglomerate focusing on utilizing alien bio-technology for personal gain. Displaced from home and forced to work under inhumane conditions, this timely and intriguing science fiction piece follows these alien immigrants in their quest for acceptance and equality. Director Neill Blomkamp, originally tapped to direct the now-defunct *Halo* movie, is leading the charge on this thought-provoking sci-fi flick.



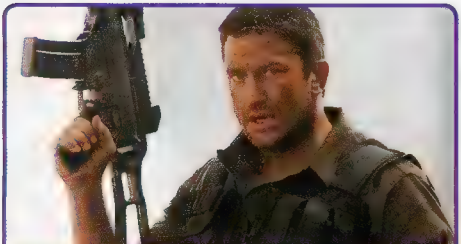
Avatar movie [illegible] ot art and dream.

James Cameron's Avatar

RELEASE DATE : Late 2009

Paradise lost

The peaceful world of Pandora is home to the Na'vi, a tribe of peaceful humanoid creatures set on preserving their civilization from outside invaders. Wounded ex-marine Jake Sully is tasked with mining Pandora's resources via an *Avatar*—a human and Na'vi crossbreed—but soon finds himself engaged in Pandora's diverse world. Caught in a vicious struggle for Pandora's resources, Sully must lead the battle against the human aggressors in order to preserve the Na'vi culture in James Cameron's latest epic. Read more about the promising Avatar game on page 50.



Not a sandal in sight: Gerard Butler's fighting for his life in *Gamer*.

Gamer

RELEASE DATE : Late 2009

Fun and games

In the near future, a new form of massively multiplayer online entertainment is sweeping the nation. "Slayers" is the next generation in no-holds-barred gaming, with modern day gladiators shooting it out for supremacy before a global audience. An often overlooked fact, however, is that each player is actually a death row inmate fighting for survival on a daily basis. For unwitting contestant Kable, "Slayers" stopped being a game a long time ago, and has turned into a relentless fight for survival.

Sackboys who eat their veggies grow up to be strapping back men.

9

RELEASE DATE : Late 2009

Their journey begins

Visionary director Shane Acker invites you to share a stunning vision of a nightmarish post-apocalyptic world—the world of *9*. After humanity ends, monstrous machines scour barren wastelands as a band of unlikely heroes—a group of sentient rag dolls—fight for the future of a once-great civilization. Tim Burton and Timur Bekmambetov bring you this adventure that begs the question: what happens when our world ends?

CONTINUED ▶

2010 & Beyond

Don't empty your wallet yet! Early 2010 is shaping up to have the strongest game release schedule in recent memory. Read on for new details on **the top 10 games we're dying to play right now.**

10 Aliens vs. Predator

RELEASE DATE: Early 2010

Guns, gore and impaled heads.

The original Aliens vs Predator thrilled gamers by allowing them to step into the claws of two of the most iconic science fiction monsters of all time. The creepy crawly Alien and the silent-but-deadly Predator each offered up a visceral gaming experience that, along with the underdog colonial marine, set the game apart from other first-person shooters. In 2010, the Xeno-tastic franchise will hit the consoles and it's already dripping with potential. Xbox 360 and PS3 gamers can look forward to roaming dark, shadowy hallways with their pulse rifles at the ready, slithering through vents to snack on the heads of unsuspecting prey, and powering up their shoulder cannons to collect the skulls of their enemies as trophies. Speaking of which, the predator's trophy kills are some of the most outrageously violent scenes we've ever seen in a video game.

The graphics engine pumps out some slick visuals and the gameplay promises to take full advantage of the three distinct characters' unique abilities. Best of all, the three separate campaigns (Alien, Marine, Predator) will be open from the beginning, letting your immediately jump into whichever character piques your interest the most. The game is slated for an early 2010 release, so start deciding which weapon you want to start with: claws and jaws, cloak and cannon, or a pulse rifle and a prayer.—**Tae K. Kim**

it's basically "game over, man."

draws the attention of an Alien. You better shoot fast or your buddy's toast.

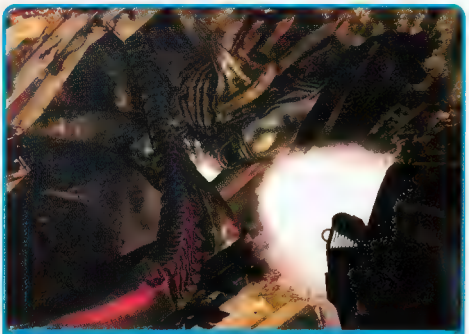
9 Aliens: Colonial Marines

RELEASE DATE : 2010

Guess she didn't like the cornbread either.

This long-delayed first-person shooter will finally hit in 2010, and I couldn't be happier. Though the game hasn't ever been shown to the press, my analysis suggests that Aliens: Colonial Marines seems to be the most ambitious, authentic attempt yet at capturing James Cameron's and Ridley Scott's vision in a video game setting. Speaking as a diehard fan of the first three films, Colonial Marines is exactly the kind of game I've been waiting for. It's delay has been heartbreaking.

That said, the game has surely seen major changes since it was announced back in 2006. The core premise is presumably unchanged. You'll outfit a squad of high-tech marines with pulse rifles, flamethrowers, and smartguns, then lead them into battle against hordes of acid-bleeding Xenomorph killers on the starship *Sulaco*. The script is being written by veterans of *Battlestar Galactica*, so there's hope for a gripping tale. Otherwise, Colonial Marines remain an enigma, so check back next year. Adios, muchachos.—**Sid Shuman**



better add multiplayer.

CONTINUED ▶

amongst the populace.

here, soldiers stand guard to protect an enterprising engineer.

maneuvers that can save your butt in the heat of battle.

PS3 X360 PC

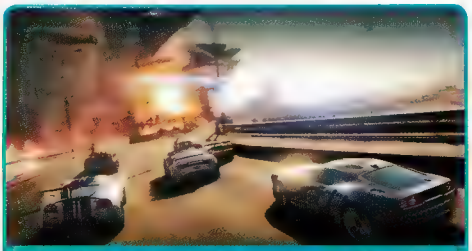
8 Brink

RELEASE DATE : May 2010

Parkour plus guns equals fun.

Most first-person shooters require you to do all the heavy lifting when it comes to movement. Is there an obstacle in your way? Then start pressing buttons and jump over it. But Brink developers Splash Damage decided to take another route: using their "S.M.A.R.T." system (Smooth Movement Around Random Terrain), gamers can automate the process of navigating in-game levels, freeing them up to focus on more important matters, like precision aiming, tactics, and general killing. Say you encounter a doorway that's guarded by laser tripwires. Point your reticule at the roof, press a button, and S.M.A.R.T. will automatically vault you up onto the roof. Point it below the trip wires and you'll perform a running slide beneath the lasers. S.M.A.R.T. also helps you perform more advanced maneuvers, such as jumping over a barrier and landing into a slide that puts you behind cover, all with minimal effort.

Brink is set in a futuristic world where Earth has been swallowed by the oceans and mankind's survivors are adrift on a final refuge called the "Ark," an artificial floating world intended as an ecology experiment. Civil war quickly breaks out among the survivors, and through your actions you'll eventually determine the fate of the doomed colony and of the human race. Brink also promises to blur the lines between online and offline play, enabling you to beef up your character's persistent skills and abilities across single-player, competitive, and cooperative play modes. These are progressive ideas, to be sure, and Splash Damage has the chops to deliver a thrilling action experience—they were responsible for the awesome Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory and Quake Wars.—**Tae K. Kim**



Split/Second's controls feel spot-on—this is a shockingly precise racer.

[illegible] heads, blow open a new shortcut, or alter the layout of the track.

PS3 · X360 · PC

7 Split/Second

RELEASE DATE : March 2010

Racing through Armageddon.

This lightning-fast racer is so packed with explosive action and cataclysmic disasters that it's practically God of War on wheels. On a futuristic reality TV show, you race against competitors in life-or-death scenarios complete with pyrotechnics worthy of Michael Bay. The carnage is constant; you won't race for longer than a few seconds before seeing a humongous explosion, toppling building, or runaway 747 slamming into the racetrack. It's electric!

As in WipeOut or Mario Kart, you can attack competitors with "Power Plays" via button prompts that pop up during the race, delaying or smashing opponents by triggering a catastrophic event. Hit the proper button and a skyscraper might smash into the racetrack, sending the race leaders skidding into oblivion. The destruction in Split/Second isn't merely a flashy gimmick, as the precise racing here could compete on its own merits. Action *and* traction; We may have a Burnout Beater here, folks.—**Sid Shuman**

TwitterPro

I like me some action movie punch with my racing games; [illegible]

twitter.com/Andy_Burt

Dave Rudden

[illegible] on EA's famous franchise.

twitter.com/DaveRudden

PC

6 All Points Bulletin (APB)

RELEASE DATE : Early 2010

Grand Theft MMO.

All Points Bulletin (APB) is creating an MMO honey pot that may prove irresistible to Grand Theft Auto fans. In the world of APB, players fill the shoes of either a cop or a crook. The sole difference between the two clashing factions is that only one carries a badge. There are no online lobbies in APB at all, with seamless in-game matchmaking pairing the bad guys against the good guys, auto-magically.

APB is dead-set on player-versus-player (PvP) combat, which means if you're a criminal trying to jack a car and a pedestrian spots you, they they'll call for an Enforcer player to come bring you down. The battles can grow into 100-player shootouts, with law enforcement players teaming up to take down the gangs. Despite its MMO status APB won't charge a monthly subscription fee, with Real Time Worlds (the creators of the original Crackdown) saying they're a firm believer in "software over subscription." EA has signed on as the distributor, and an Xbox 360 version may be in the works. —**Will Herring**

[illegible] gangs and law enforcement with APB.

[illegible] potential victims and allies. Only in APB.

CONTINUED ▶

captivating storyline makes you care.

beam, sit back, and enjoy the fireworks show.

5 Homefront

RELEASE DATE : 2010

Last stand: Colorado.

The developer of Frontlines: Fuel of War is taking another stab at a first-person shooter set in a foreign-occupied America. This time, however, they're getting help from screenwriter and director John Milius (*Apocalypse Now*, *Dirty Harry*, *Red Dawn*) and the results look promising already. The tale begins in 2027 and, as in Frontlines, the world is reeling from a global energy crisis. Amidst the chaos, North Korean troops have wiped out most of the American military and now occupy the lower 48 states. Another, unnamed entity is actually pulling the strings, and you'll slowly reveal the true threat as you play.

Homefront opens in a small shantytown in the mountains of Colorado—the last free territory in the good old USA. As a ragtag soldier, you tour the dilapidated village and gain insight into the U.S. refugees' way of life: primitive agriculture, feeble solar power generation, and other details that help make the world feel alive. The tranquil opening moments are shattered after a surprise attack by the North Koreans, and the ensuing battle shakes the tiny community to its foundation and sends the survivors running for their lives. Homefront's graphics and action already appear cutting-edge, but we were most drawn to its intriguing "what if" storyline, which echoes Half-Life's seamless in-game narrative. Though Homefront is early in production, it's already showing exceptional promise and is a key shooter to watch in 2010. **—Travis Moses**

TwitterPro

4 Heavy Rain

RELEASE DATE : Early 2010

Choose your own thriller.

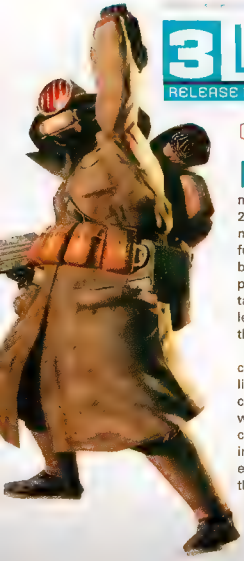
How far are you willing to go to save someone you love? That's the core question behind Heavy Rain, a noir-tinged thriller designed by the team behind fan-favorite Indigo Prophecy. As a serial killer stalks the streets, you'll control four playable characters: Norman Jayden, an FBI profiler who is addicted to a synthetic street drug; Madison Paige, a nosey young journalist; and two others. These four individuals don't know each other, but are connected by being tangled in the web of the twisted Origami Killer.

The four characters each take different tactics in flushing out the killer, from old-fashioned snooping to cutting-edge forensics devices. If any of the four characters die—and they can, if you fumble in important scenes—the story will continue on seamlessly with the survivors. But you'll lose that victim's unique abilities and perspective permanently. It's all part of the developer's plan to make you feel complex emotions such as grief and loss. But you still haven't answered my question. How far are you willing to go to save someone you love?**—Sid Shuman**

spell death outright, though this doesn't look like a good situation for Jayden.

need a little help from your co-op partners to take this beast down.

foes of all sizes and shapes.



3 Lost Planet 2

RELEASE DATE : Early 2010

Co-op in the belly of the beast.

Lost Planet 2 is approximately 1000 times more interesting than the original game. Lost Planet 1, you'll recall, was a weird mish-mash of shooter conventions with little rhyme or reason. Lost Planet 2 is far more energetic and inspired, playing like a hyperactive combination of Shadow of the Colossus and Halo. It's weird, but very, very fun, especially when played online with four players. You and your buddies are fighting the Akrid, a race of monstrous aliens on a distant planet. This third-person shooting has logical controls and a mountain of collectable weapons and gear. The graphics are a quantum leap over the original game, with massive alien jungles and creatures that tower hundreds of feet over the battlefield.

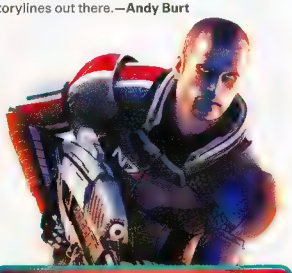
In fact, Lost Planet 2's specialty is giant monster battles. My co-op partner and I assaulted a 300-foot tall organism that looked like a skinless blue whale, except that it stormed around on six muscular legs. The creature's body was studded with glowing orange weak spots, and after several minutes of concentrated fire we sent it crashing violently to the ground. From there, we plunged into its gaping mouth and blew it apart from within. It was a gripping experience: epic, bizarre, colorful, and engaging. Then I was told it was "one of the smaller bosses" in the game. Thanks, Capcom.—**Sid Shuman**

2 Mass Effect 2

RELEASE DATE : Spring 2010

Hard sci-fi gets real.

BioWare's epic sci-fi sequel will address some key shortcomings of the original game, particularly in regards to combat. In Mass Effect 2, the shootouts look to be far more engaging than in the first title, with Shepard having access to über-destructive weapons such as a homing rocket launcher. Additionally, BioWare has added more depth to the damage system, with players able to blow the limbs off enemies with strategically targeted shots. Making quick decisions in combat will be much easier, with shortcuts added to manage each character's weapons and Biotic powers. Inventory management is also leaner and meaner, and health packs are gone in favor of regenerative health. The result could be a tighter, more focused action game tucked inside one of the best RPG storylines out there.—**Andy Burt**



2's storyline. In Shepard's defense, he's dead for real.

CONTINUED ▶

[illegible] stretches back to the original game. The sooner it comes out, the better!

[illegible] jugular can't feel nice.

[illegible]

1 God of War III

RELEASE DATE : Early 2010

Finally, Kratos kills everyone.

Curse the gods: why are they punishing us by forcing us to wait until March 2010 to play Kratos's third (and allegedly final) adventure? Maybe reviewing our hands-on playtime of God of War III will help pass the time. As always, Kratos is blessed with smooth, responsive controls. And though the game currently runs at a slightly slower 30 frames per second, the graphics are some of the finest we've ever seen.

One of the coolest new additions to Kratos's arsenal of quasi-Greek weaponry is the Cestus, or as game director Stig Asmussen calls them, "heavy metal boxing gloves." The Cestus may not have the reach of Kratos's Blades of Athena, but they pack a brutal punch. Aside from their ability to turn enemy faces into meat pie, Kratos can use the Cestus to smash through solid objects and walls to progress. The Icarus Wings are also making a return in God of War III for use during "Icarus Ascent" segments, in which Kratos ascends a heat shaft deep inside Mt. Olympus while dodging obstructions and fighting enemies. For Kratos's last adventure, fans of the series will have a ton to look forward to, and the sooner 2010 comes, the better.—**Andy Burt**

TwitterPro

Sid Shuman

This game plays as good as it looks. The Cyclops-riding [illegible] system-seller for sure.

twitter.com/SidShuman

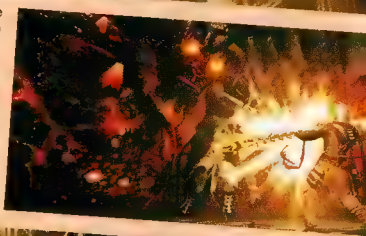
Dante's Inferno

RELEASE DATE : [illegible]

EA takes on God of War in 2010.

Though God of War III may have all the buzz, mega-publisher EA's house studio Visceral Games is working on an action title with a strikingly similar look and feel. As Dante, you carve your way through the Nine Circles of Hell while searching for your long-lost bride. The blistering melee, gushing gore, and dark tone seem to be ripped straight out of God of War, though EA is promising more surprises in the final version.

Dante's Inferno garnered headlines of a different sort at the 2009 E3 Expo. EA hired a mob of actors to "protest" the game in front of the L.A. Convention Center. Though the ruse was quickly uncovered, we're hoping that Dante's Inferno will be able to stand on its own merits when it releases in early 2010.—**Sid Shuman**



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GAME OF THE MONTH

Little King's Story

In a month where prototypical walking weapons of mass destruction, gun slinging brothers in blood and earth-shattering haymakers dominated our consoles, it became an increasingly tough decision as to which title was most deserving of our coveted Game of the Month award. Distracted by the enormous amounts of hype surrounding our next-gen contenders, we almost let the third party sleeper hit Little King's Story slip our attention. But luckily, the game proved to be too charming and addictive for us to overlook it for long.

Like any good ruler, Little King snuck into power when no one was looking, quickly trumping its competition with a mixture of fine-tuned strategy and immersive role-playing adventure. While the quest for world domination is nothing new to the gaming community, rarely is it executed with the amount of charm and poise that makes Little King's Story such an unforgettable experience. Don't let the criminally adorable design fool you: Little King is a masterfully crafted and downright fun experience that definitely had the office talking, and more importantly, playing. What more could we ask for in a Game of the Month?

Game Reviews:

Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood (Xbox 360) 80
Fight Night Round 4 (PS3, Xbox 360) 74
Flower, Sun and Rain (DS) 83
Guitar Hero On Tour: Modern Hits (DS) 83
Little King's Story (Wii) 76
Marvel vs. Capcom 2 (PS3 Xbox 360) 82
Monster Hunter: Freedom Unite (PSP) 79
Overlord II (PS3, Xbox 360) 78
Prototype (PS3, Xbox 360) 72
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10 (PS3, Xbox 360) 81
Wii MotionPlus (Wii) 84

Jakks Pacific *Star Wars* Kites

This is as close as you'll ever get to flying an X-Wing

GamePro Editors' Choice

One of our favorite summertime activities is kite-flying. Yes, it's old-fashioned but there's just something about being out in the fresh air while watching a kite soar majestically in the sky that makes it worth putting the game controller down for a few hours. It also helps that when we go kite-flying these days, we go armed with these awesome Star Wars kites from Jakks Pacific. You can choose between kites shaped like an X-Wing, a Tie Fighter or the Millenium Falcon and they even have cool lightsaber-shaped handles.

The kites are also 3D models, meaning they aren't just flat kites with lame Star Wars graphics stenciled on. They have actual wings and features and watching one of them take off from your hand and soar into the sky is pretty cool. Just don't be weird like us and hum the Star Wars theme song the entire time you're outside; people tend to get a little freaked out by that.

www.jakkspacific.com
$19.99

Fun Factor: ★★★★½

GamePro's Rating Scale

Behind the Stars

★★★★½ 4.5 to 5 Stars — The best of the best. If you don't own this game, you should. Think Halo, Zelda, Resident Evil, and Metal Gear Solid.

★★★½☆ 3.5 to 4 Stars — Highly enjoyable, but falls short of true greatness. The Fight Nights and Tony Hawks of the world.

★★½☆☆ 2.5 to 3 Stars — Approach with caution—try before you buy. Enter the Matrix and the Dynasty Warriors games fall squarely in this category.

★☆☆☆☆ 1.5 to 2 Stars — Should come with a sticker: "Warning, contains poisonous amounts of suckage." Remember Backyard Wrestling?

★★★★½ 0 to 1 Star — An absolute insult to humanity. Kill it with fire and holy water.

GamePro Editors' Choice

Games that score ★★★★½ or higher are awarded our coveted Editors' Choice Award.

Be wary of staying this close to enemies. You're usually better off with a stick-and-move approach.

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

PROTOTYPE

Who wouldn't want to be a walking talking weapon of mass consumption?

PS3 | Xbox 360 | [illegible]

Developer Radical Entertainment | Publisher Activision

For most of us, walking around a crowded metropolis is a hellish experience. Being surrounded on all sides by jostling people, honking cars, and immense buildings can make you feel powerless and trapped. Prototype's virtual Manhattan also seethes with a veritable wall of humanity—along with soldiers, infected creeps, and other menaces—but Alex Mercer is anything but an ordinary pedestrian. For him, the madding crowd isn't an annoying fact of life: it's an all-you-can-eat buffet.

MEDICINE MAN

As soon as the game loads, I'm thrust into a world brought low by some horrible biological crisis, and I'm at the height of my wrath. For a few minutes I'm practically unstoppable, crashing through military hardware and doing grotesque things to my fellow citizens with my insane powers. When this short tour of the possibilities and a besieged Times Square ends, I'm thrust 18 days into the past to piece together what happened to New York City and how I came to be this angry and inhuman demigod.

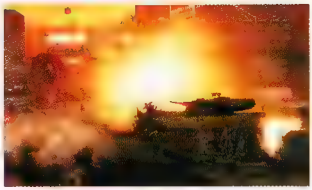
Just about every object in the massive world of Prototype reacts to your actions—often explosively.

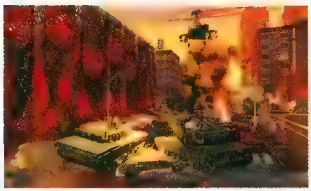
I encounter more satisfying action and memorable unscripted moments in the first five minutes of Prototype than I have in the entirety of many lesser action games, and the whole experience is serviced by a sense of flair and meaning that's compelling without ever becoming suffocating. While so many free-roaming sandbox games commit their resources to ho-hum day/night cycles and dozens of generic four-door sedans, and then bore you to tears with endless errands and uninspired tedium, Prototype makes abundantly clear within moments that you're in for a lightning-paced and intensely cinematic exaggeration of a profoundly damaged urban life.

INFECTIOUS AGENT

There's plenty of substance bristling below that stylized surface, too. I could spend this entire review detailing your powers and still not cover them all. As Alex Mercer, I can transform my arms into weapons that range from a single scythe that shreds tanks like an outsize can-opener to claws, bludgeons, and a thick alien vein of a whip. I can sheathe myself in armor that makes Teflon look like cellophane, and run up the sides of buildings.

Don't expect to slice dudes in half with impunity. Chances are one of this guy's buddies saw what you did, and isn't too happy about it.





That barren metal husk? Yeah, that used to be a helicopter. The pilot's somewhere in those bits and pieces that are flying around.

I can jump to crazy heights, glide through the air like a flying squirrel, and slam into the ground hard enough to destroy the cars I won't miss driving. I can even fire the assault rifles and rocket launchers left behind when I devour some poor soldier so I can sneak around in his skin.

Every one of the game's powers is also upgradeable with evolution points, which you earn during the course of your adventures. By augmenting my abilities, I learned how to run faster, uncork new combination attacks, and rattle entire neighborhoods with horrific smart bomb "devastators" that send spikes or tentacles through everything in sight. Best of all, the outstanding controls never get in the way, and let me switch between my powers easily and intuitively.

Choose Your Own Disaster

All those powers let you achieve your objectives using drastically different approaches, and Prototype's best missions take full advantage of that flexibility. Need to infiltrate a base? You can rush around on foot sabotaging defenses then stealth-consume some patrols before quietly snacking on the base commander. Or you can grab and eat your target in full view of his comrades and try to bull your way through the ensuing aftermath.

I have to admit I occasionally got frustrated with a few of the longer missions—particularly one that insisted I sustain the interest of a Hunter with attention deficit disorder while luring him from one end of the city to the other—but the majority were entertaining and varied enough to keep me playing for many hours at a time.

But even after you complete the 31 main missions, there's still plenty left to keep you busy. Web of Intrigue targets unlock hyper-stylized movies that dribble out tantalizing details from this dark alternate universe, and collectible landmark and hint orbs hide all over the place. Tons of side missions challenge you to run through waypoints, slaughter crowds, glide for accuracy, and much more. I spent at least two hours happily hijacking helicopters and annihilating infected base buildings just for the sheer hell of it.

A Potent Pathogen

Apart from the occasional spike in difficulty, a couple things got on my nerves. The first was the surprising lack of monster variety. Sure, there are different species of Hunter and walking wounded, but they don't behave all that differently, and it falls to just a handful of cool boss battles to fill out the mutated zoo. I was also irritated when temporarily robbed of the powers I'd worked to upgrade for a handful of missions, and disappointed that a game that seems to owe a debt to Crackdown doesn't feature a co-op mode.

But the truth is even talking about these issues feels like nitpicking because I can't wait to go play some more. I suspect some people will find their enthusiasm drained more than mine by the shallow enemy gene pool, but even they're bound to get swept away by the myriad pleasures of tearing up town as a ghoulish and preternaturally fleet-footed shape-shifter.—**Cameron Lewis**

FUN FACTOR

★★★★☆

PROS: [illegible] ity; beautiful [illegible] o; satisfying story.

CONS: Not much difference between various enemy types; some irritatingly drawn-out missions; some sudden jumps in difficulty.

The status meters are useful but for an authentic experience, we suggest you turn them off. That'll let you focus on the in-ring action.

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 4

The sweet science is sweeter than ever in the fourth round.

GAMEPRO EDITORS CHOICE

PS3 | Xbox 360 | [illegible]

■ Developer: EA Canada ■ Publisher: EA Sports

It's hard to forget the first time I landed an orbital-crushing haymaker in Fight Night Round 3: my vicious blow sent ripples across the opponent's cheeks and bodily fluids flying towards the canvas. No other boxing sim since has come close to recreating that amazing combination of visual brutality and gameplay finesse until now—Fight Night Round 4 is finally here and while it may not have the same revolutionary impact of its predecessor, it's a major step up in nearly every imaginable way.

STUNNING PUNCHES

It's easy to think back on how great Round 3 looked for its time, but a lot has changed in the three years since its release. Luckily, Round 4 is no slouch: the fighters look better than ever, with increased detail and more lifelike animations, and the upgrade to 60 frames per second irons out the clunky movements and other hiccups from the last game. Fighters still show visual damage and fatigue over the course of a match, but unlike Round 3, the user interface (with health, stamina, and damage meters) is on by default, so you'll have to manually disable it if you're looking for a less intrusive on-screen experience. With or without the meters, the knockdown punches remain a highlight, with the action slowing down and the camera zooming in for that exact moment that your perfect punch reaches its destination.

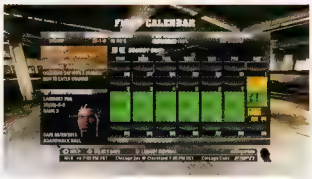
Well worth noting is the increased emphasis on peripheral details outside the ring, which help create the sensation of fighting on the world stage. As you weave around the ring, you'll see photographers lining up their shots, judges keeping score, and even trainers shadowboxing near the corner. Also appreciated is the presense of Teddy Atlas who joins play-by-play man Joe Tessitore to offer compelling insight about the fighters and the current state of the sport. The dialogue gets recycled but it's worthwhile and interesting.

Set up dream matches like Ali versus Tyson and let some of the greatest fighters of all time duke it out.

FRENZIED FISTS

From its outset, the Fight Night franchise has always revolved around the Total Punch

Fight Night Round 4 offers up some sweet graphics that really packs a punch (sorry—terrible pun).



Manny Pacquio's digital counterpart is just as deadly as the real thing. Watch out for his right hook!

Control analog scheme, but it reaches a newfound level of speed and fluidity in Round 4. Launching basic jabs, hooks, and uppercuts requires simple movements of the right analog stick, and they're more easily chained than in Round 3. You'll link together combinations with just a little practice, and a freshly tweaked physics engine means even off base and glancing blows will have some impact on your opponent. Haymakers are now executed by holding a shoulder button in concert with analog movements, giving you a bit more control over when exactly to take a chance and throw a potentially round-changing punch.

And "chance" is the key word here: should you miss, you may leave yourself wide open for a counter-punch, which can turn your powerful attempt into a quick trip to the mat. Should you find yourself on the floor, you'll need to regain vertical orientation using the analog sticks, which becomes increasingly difficult as the fight rages on. Assuming you make it through a round, you'll find a much different corner experience than in previous series entries. Rather than physically address swelling or cuts, you'll earn points from each round (for landing a high percentage of punches or stunning/knocking down your foe) that can be spent to recover your health or stamina, or reduce your accumulated damage.

Decide Your Legacy

Round 4's Fight Now mode is where you'll find standalone one-on-one bouts between any two fighters of your choice, whether it's legends like Muhammad Ali and Mike Tyson or more contemporary brawlers like Manny Pacquiao and Ricky Hatton. Alternately, you can create your own character using the robust editor (which includes the ability to use a real-life image for the face) or even download someone else's created fighter.

Most of your offline time will probably be spent in the new Legacy mode, which replaces Round 3's rudimentary career offering. You start in an amateur tournament and work your way up through the ranks. What gives the mode real weight is a sense of existing in a persistent world—as the years add up, other fighters retire, you'll win awards, and you have a fair amount of say in how your career build and ultimately ends. It would've been nice to see some out-of-the-ring activities or more interesting interactions with the other fighters or promoters, though.

Champion of the World

Luckily, the fight continues online, and my experience duking it out with faraway foes was just as strong as that of playing with someone in the same room: uproariously fun, surprisingly smooth, and completely lag free. The highlight of the online experience might be the World Championship mode, which offers a single belt across each of the three selected weight classes for all the world's players to fight for. I didn't get a chance to see the full extent of this mode but it certainly seems to hold a ton of promise for the more competitive and committed Fight Night fans out there.

Fight Night Round 4 lacks some of the wow factor of its predecessor, but it builds upon the strengths of Round 3 and corrects most of its weaknesses. Three years is a long time to wait for a sports sequel, but Round 4 is an excellent and necessary upgrade for all Fight Night fans, and it reasserts the series as the (relatively) uncontested titleholder across all simulation-style boxing games.—**Andrew Hayward**

FUN FACTOR

PROS: improved controls and presentation; robust feature set including online modes.

CONS: Legacy mode could use some variety; not quite as much a step up as Round 3.

The Uma guardians that traverse the wild may be sure, but they're quite deadly. Be sure to pick your troops wisely!

LITTLE KING'S STORY

Simply put, it's good to be the king.

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

Wii

Developer: Cing Publisher: XSEED

An intriguing blend of real time strategy, life development and role playing action, Little King's Story proves itself as a fun-filled and wholly engaging experience for even the most jaded gamer, all wrapped up in a deceptively cute package.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

I'll admit firsthand that I was more than weary when I was handed Little King's Story for review. As I flipped through the press release, a pint-sized, scepter-wielding tot right out of any number of Saturday morning cartoons stared back at me—a "little king" in every sense of the word. While "cutesy" character design doesn't always mean a similarly sugar-coated gaming experience, I couldn't get over the unyielding doubt in the pit of my stomach, leaving me thoroughly convinced I was about to spend the next week trudging through an edutainment title fit for grade-schoolers.

Sometimes, I truly love it when I'm so drastically wrong. While there's no question that the vibrant visuals and youthful presentation may leave some gamers hesitant, I think it's safe to say that Little King's Story is a prime example of knowing never to judge a book by its cover. The premise behind Little King's Story is a simple, yet charming yarn: boy wanders through the woods, boy comes across magical crown, boy is named king of his village, boy begins campaign for world domination by obliterating one kingdom at a time. Of course, you won't go at it alone: with the help of your colorful cast of court advisors, not to mention your numerous loyal subjects and faithful hand-picked royal guard, the world will soon be yours for the taking. After nap-time, of course.

HAIL TO THE KING

A fine mix between classics such as Harvest Moon, Pikmin, and (oddly enough) Command & Conquer, Little King's gameplay is an innovative melting pot of genre-bending ingredients, thickly applied to a wonderfully engaging and open world. When you first start off, your kingdom is nothing more than a few wooden huts, and your castle a scrappy wooden shack. What's worse is that your villagers are carefree hippies, laying about in the fields and basking in your royal generosity. After constructing a few training huts, you're given the opportunity to whip your subjects into shape as either Hardworking Farmers or Military Grunts, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Where Farmers are experts at digging up hidden treasures, Grunts are indispensable when it comes to dealing with Uma, Little King's unforgiving monster populace. After choosing any combination of characters, each with their own health specifications, likes, dislikes and daily routines, it's time to venture out into world.

Your party will follow behind you Pikmin-style, allowing you to cycle between specific character classes with a press of down on the directional

pad. When you see a log that might make some good timber, a tap of the A button will send your Farmers out to chop it to pieces. A gang of vile Uma approaching? Tap down, cycle to your Grunts, and send them into battle with the same simple mechanics, leaving your Farmers safe to work. While it can admittedly get a tad confusing later in the game when you're dealing with a larger variety of classes, the "point, click, deploy" formula works extremely well for Little King, and really helps add to the game's "pick up and play" atmosphere.

As your kingdom expands and your populace grows, you'll get the opportunity to build new training huts for careers such as Animal Hunter (warriors that specialize in ranged combat), Merchant (savvy businessmen who are invaluable when it comes to financing your ever-expanding campaign), Carpenter (handy men and women who specialize in building stairs, bridges and other forms of development) and many, many more. Mixing and matching is undoubtedly the name of the game, as you never know whose skills you may need when you venture out into the richly populated wilderness, unsure of what trials and challenges await.

At Arms!

Of course, Little King isn't all just about expansion. An interesting quest system is present in the town suggestion box, which allows your subjects to voice their feelings regarding the current state of the kingdom, and more often than not there will be an important quest waiting amongst your fan mail calling you back to arms. Quests can range from investigating rumors to dealing with town troublemakers to battling vicious Uma guardians—ferocious (and oftentimes humorous) creatures that rule over all of the monsters in a particular terrain. Taking care of said guardians will relieve that area from Uma rule, giving you the opportunity to develop the newly deserted land as you see fit. Admittedly, these battles can get a bit confusing, as you'll have to be incredibly quick on the trigger in order to switch between your specific units on the fly, deploying them and calling them back when low on life. While always fun, the combat system can definitely become a bit hectic when you're actively in charge of 30 different units, all with their own abilities and health bars.

Exploration is another important part of Little King, and it's where the Harvest Moon dynamic comes into play. Adventuring around your kingdom is a treat, as characters will react to you in real time, applauding and cheering if you're a benevolent goody two-shoes or cowering in fear if you're a ruthless tax collector. Interesting and insane NPCs from an unhinged evangelist priest to a pretentious art gallery owner go about their daily routines while citizens work away through unique day/night cycles. Venturing through your newly expanded kingdom after a successful raid on one of the six mystery kings is a fantastic feeling that's only more so complimented by the lively characters that inhabit it.

Charge!

Adorable, charming, and an absolute blast, Little King's Story is more than worth your time – and weighing in at about 30 hours, it deserves every minute it can get! A surprising and enchanting experience, I think it's safe to say that Little King's Story is a must-own title that I certainly couldn't have expected, which only makes this hybrid RPG's success all the sweeter.—**Will Herring**

From Hardworking Farmers to Military Grunts, each class in Little King's Story has its own unique strengths and weaknesses.

The world of Little King's Story is a vibrant one that urges players to spend plenty of time exploring, conquering and expanding.

incredibly in-depth.

CONS: Lackluster story; battles can get unnecessarily confusing.

You possess formidable powers but it's often smarter to let your minions do your dirty work for you. "Order 'round my minions, like a boss!"

OVERLORD II

Being evil is a lot of fun but there's a price to be paid.

PS3 | Xbox 360

Developer: Triumph Studios ■ Publisher: Codemasters

The first Overlord was an overlooked adventure game that blended the best parts of Pikmin with the worst parts of the Bible. Casting gamers as a walking apocalypse with demon underlings, the delightfully cheery fantasy world gave the game a dark yet charming personality. Overlord II recaptures the black magic, but problems old and new make it a disappointing sequel.

STRATEGIC DEMONIZING

Your unbridled violence as the Overlord doesn't stem from third-person hack 'n slash combat. Instead, you'll order four minion types—brown brawlers, ranged reds, sneaky greens and pacifist blue healers—to tactically advantageous positions using the right stick. Separating them into squadrons and finding alternative ways to win is an effective way to stick strategy into an adventure game, though I found the lock-on system to be finicky at best, and worsened by an uncooperative camera. Between bouts you'll set sail in stolen elf ships and siege castles with catapults while taking on side quests from fearful worshippers.

The catch to getting through these quests is that the map is too small to be useful and vague mission details had me aimlessly running in circles. And if I failed that objective, the wretched checkpoints sent me back 20 to 30 minutes, forcing me to retry completed missions after long walks across huge maps.

THE CHARM IN THE HARM

And yet, despite its hang-ups, Overlord II is a smart parody of the moral pendulum in games. The Overlord is evil incarnate, a villain through and through, so his ethical outlook isn't a choice between naughty or nice. Instead, you'll balance your malevolence against the potential reward; for instance, enslaved townsfolk offer you piles of money over time but slaughtering them provides instant benefits. Juggling your path down the dark side is half the fun and there's a constant sense of satisfaction that comes from taking over the world. Imagine that.

Part of what makes the world worth conquering is that it's so lovable. The pleasant atmosphere and delightful settings mix well with the twisted humor of your wanton violence. Your minions are all too anxious to club cute baby seals, burn fluffy bunnies and destroy tree-hugging elf hippies. The addition of a Roman Empire-esque enemy in the fantasy world is great as well—I still crack up thinking about minions wearing too-large Legionnaire armor while riding on wolves or stabbing unicorns in the Coliseum.

DIABOLICAL DEVILRY

Overlord II is a decent game that maintains its predecessor's greatness, but it doesn't show enough progression or improvement. The unforgiving checkpoints and host of other problems make it a frustrating experience, making for a sinfully fun title that forces you to pay a steep penance for your enjoyment.—**Mitchell Dyer**

Editor's Note: Our Overlord II review copies had issues that may not be present in the retail version, but for full disclosure you should know that the Xbox 360 version was prone to crashing to the dashboard. The PS3 build suffered from sluggish framerate issues as well, something the original Overlord's "Raising Hell" release on PlayStation 3 had as well. We hope these issues will be addressed in the retail version.

FUN FACTOR

★★★☆☆

PROS: Lovable world; decent variety of objectives; original action/strategy gameplay.

CONS: Awful checkpoints, camera, map and lock-on system.

In Monster Hunter: Freedom Unite for the PSP, the poor camera and lack of lock-on targeting make battles far more difficult than they should be.

Monster Hunter Freedom Unite

Two major issues keep this Japanese blockbuster from conquering our shores.

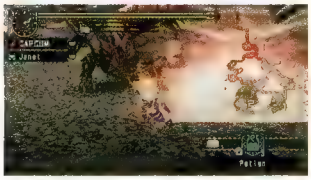
PSP

Develop[illegible]

While it's relatively unknown franchise to U.S. gamers, the Monster Hunter series is a beast in Japan, regularly selling hundreds of thousands of copies. Freedom Unite is the latest chapter to be released here and it retains the complexity and depth that the series is known for. However, a couple of glaring flaws almost single-handedly doom Freedom Unite and keep it from becoming a true global phenomenon.

Lights, Camera, Action

Huge-flaw number one: the camera. An important crux of any third-person action title is the ability to always be able to interrupt, act and respond to whatever is going on around your character, and in Freedom Unite that is not always the case.



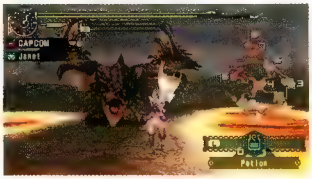
The in-game camera is unreliable and flaky which often leaves you vulnerable in battle. It's hard to survive battles with vicious monsters when the camera suddenly collides with a wall, forcing you out of the frame. It's even worse considering the fact that circle-strafe is an almost necessary tactic.

This brings me to my second complaint: the weak combat. I especially hated the absence of lock-on targeting. This simple addition could have made battles manageable and fun. Without it, engagements that are already made difficult due to the wonky camera become even tougher, especially when you go up against the more agile beasts.

United We Stand

While those are really the only two major gripes one can find with the game (besides long load-times), they keep MHFU from realizing its potential. Freedom Unite has some of the best graphics on the PSP, and the character and monster animation is topnotch. There are over 400 missions, which is insanely impressive and the depth of the weapon and armor customization is ridiculous.

But in the end, all that content feels kind of wasted due to the horrible camera and lackluster combat. It's like taking a delicious steak and drowning it in a foul-smelling sauce; sure, you can get a few good bites here and there but for the most part, you're too busy holding your nose to truly enjoy yourself.—**Aaron Koehn**



FUN FACTOR

PROS: Topnotch graphics; deep weapon and armor customization; tons of missions.

CONS: Horrible camera and poorly implemented combat.

Rifles are best for long-range firefights but they're still decent for close-range dirty work. Just make sure you don't miss as there's a delay between each shot.

CALL OF JUAREZ: BOUND IN BLOOD

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

A good old-fashioned Wild West shoot-out.

Xbox 360 ★★★★½

■ Developer: Techland ■ Publisher: Ubisoft

When I reviewed the first Call of Juarez back in 2007, I praised the game's unique Wild-West setting but lamented the poor pacing and weak gameplay. Techland's follow-up effort, Bound in Blood, is much, much better and it's obvious the developers learned from their earlier mistakes. It's as close as you're going to get to playing a Sergio Leone movie and really, it's about damn time we had a good Western shooter.

BACK IN THE SADDLE

A prequel to the original Call of Juarez, Bound in Blood improves upon the set formula in almost every way. The new proprietary engine pumps out some amazing visuals, especially in the cutscenes; the vast desert vistas and arid mountains also stand out as do the authentic frontier towns. The story, which relies on standard Wild West tropes like greed, betrayal and redemption, is effectively told and remains solid and engaging throughout; it's not up to the level of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* but it's also more than just an excuse to move you from shoot-out to shoot-out. It definitely helps that both the voice acting and writing are solid.

It's nice that the visuals and storytelling are expertly handled as they serve as a nice backdrop for the much-improved gun battles. You get a chance to reenact pretty much every type of Wild West shoot-out you can imagine, from hairy bullet exchanges in a saloon to long distance rifle battles out in the desert; there are even sequences where you're astride a horse and there's nothing like picking someone off while in the saddle. The gunfights are integrated into the story really well and you always feel like you're doing something, rather than just wasting bullets on nameless foes. I also liked the cool quick-time events and classic quick-draw duels as well.

MISFIRES AND NEAR-MISSES

Bound in Blood doesn't have any major flaws but I did notice that dynamite is way too effective in the hands of the enemy. They throw it like grenades and the heads-up display does a poor job of telling you where it lands; the only saving grace is that only a handful of enemies use them as thrown weapons. Engaging enemies at long-distance can also be tricky as it's sometimes hard to pick them out against the horizon.

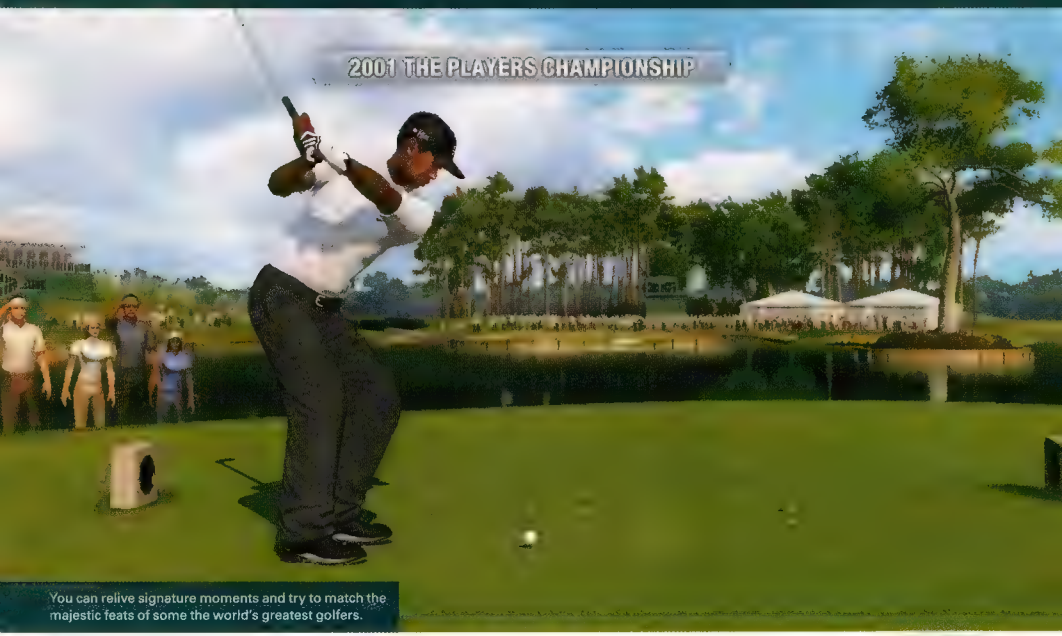
But those are the only real problems that I had with the game, which says a lot about the overall quality of the title. It took me about seven hours to beat the game and I'd have to say I was thoroughly engaged about 90 percent of the time. It was definitely a nice change of pace from the standard World War II/sci-fi settings and until someone does it better, Bound in Blood is, in my opinion, the best Western-themed shooter around.—**Tae K. Kim**

FUN FACTOR

★★★★½

PROS: Solid storytelling, great visuals, and Wild West setting make for a unique experience.

CONS: Enemy uses dynamite too effectively; enemies can be hard to locate during long-distance gunfights.



You can relive signature moments and try to match the majestic feats of some the world's greatest golfers.

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10

The world's greatest golfer stars in the world's greatest golf game.

GamePro Editors' Choice

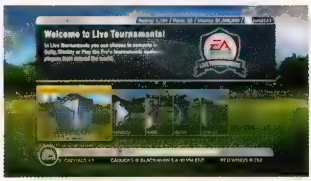
PS3 | Xbox 360 | ESRB: E

■ Developer: EA Tiburon ■ Publisher: EA Sports

Since returning from injury, Tiger Woods has reasserted himself as the best golfer in the world. Being "the best" means high expectations—expectations that Woods has been living up to, but what about his video game equivalent? The short answer is that Tiger Woods PGA Tour '10 is the best golf game around. It has a plethora of new features that build upon the foundation laid down by last year's highly acclaimed version and dominates the (digital) greens much like the golfer it's named after.

Right Down The Fairway

It's always a mystery who will get the call to join Tiger's gang in the latest version of PGA Tour 10 but this year, that decision was made easy by the performance of Anthony Kim and Rocco Mediate who both proved themselves more than worthy of getting digitized. Along with the upgraded roster, the courses got a massive face lift as well as; especially impressive are the expanded spectator groups who follow you around.



Dynamic Weather conditions, powered by the Weather Channel, also influence your performance and while it's a nice addition, it's ultimately nothing more than a fancy gimmick. There's also the useful yet somewhat fickle "Precision Putting." Instead of five putters that go a variety of distances, you get one putter that stretches all the way from one inch to 100 feet. The new putting stroke is frustrating at first, as it is a significant change from last year's putting style but after a couple of rounds you should get a feel for it and making putts should become less difficult. If putting isn't your specialty and the learning curve is too steep, you can switch to a traditional three-click system.

Making the Cut

The 2010 version also features a tweaked "Tournament Challenge" mode that focuses on specific moments culled from the golfers' careers. The emphasis, as always is on Tiger and you get a chance to hear exactly how each signature moment played out from his point of view. It is really a sweet feature that adds to the overall enjoyment.

Multiplayer modes also abound thanks to the Daily, Weekly and Play the Pros tourneys. Play the Pros is probably the most satisfying but all three add value to an already solid golfing experience. I also appreciated the solid play-by-play, provided by ESPN anchor Scott Van Pelt. He blends a superfluous knowledge of sports with a level of humor that neither insults nor bores. And because this is an EA title, the USGA is fully represented, making every round an authentic experience.

It's In The Hole

This year's version of Tiger Woods PGA Tour is as sweet as a 350 yard tee shot down the middle of the fairway. It will challenge experienced players while still providing enough teaching and lessons to acclimate even the newest of players. If this game is not in the running for "Sports Game of the Year" awards, I will be really surprised. **—Nathan Lindberg**

FUN FACTOR

★★★★½

PROS: [illegible] so far.

CONS: Live Tournament scoring can be unrealistic; some features are gimmicky

The polished 2D graphics and gorgeous 3D backgrounds return but they've gotten a much needed facelift.

MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 2

This action-packed fighter looks even better than we remember...and it's finally online.

EDITORS' CHOICE

PS3 | Xbox 360 | ESRB: T

Developer: Backbone Entertainment ■ Publisher: Capcom

After playing Marvel vs. Capcom 2 again, it's easy to see why there hasn't been a sequel for almost 10 years—it's almost impossible to improve upon perfection. This cult-hit title has an insane roster made up of characters from Capcom's stable—Mega Man, Ryu, Jill Valentine—as well as favorites from Marvel like Iron Man, Spider-Man and Wolverine. Add in the 3-on-3 team combat, a complex fighting system and hundreds of screen-filling ultra combo bonanzas, and it's obvious: this game makes almost any other fighter look boring and lifeless by comparison. Now, the game is coming to XBLA and PSN with one amazing addition: online multiplayer.

GET READY TO KICK BUTT

But the improvements don't stop there. One thing fans should really love is the ability to tweak your graphical settings to make the 2D graphics as smooth, crisp, or pixilated as you desire. With this next-gen update, Marvel vs. Capcom 2 has gotten its parent company's patented "so late but still good" HD makeover treatment, with every graphical bit of the game sharpened and upscaled. The visuals really pop at the right settings, and the wider dimensions make the battles seem bigger and badder.

Really, the only complaint I've got is with the control scheme. Since there's no longer a control option that lets you auto-map an ultra combo to a single button, pulling off any of your special attacks require awkward hand motions, especially on the standard Xbox 360 controller. If you want to avoid cramps and carpal tunnel, I would recommend that you start breaking out some SFIV or HORI arcade sticks for some much-needed comfort.

GONNA TAKE YOU FOR A RIDE

Of course, the major draw for Marvel vs. Capcom 2 is the online multiplayer, which now, at long last, has dedicated, no-lag support for everyone with a solid, working Internet connection. Our online session with Capcom didn't yield any lag, and just about everyone should be happy about the inclusion of accessible modes for both casual players and the competitive hardcore wackos, much like online multiplayer system for Super Street Fighter II turbo HD Remix.

Overall, Marvel vs. Capcom 2 is pretty much a picture perfect port that won't disappoint fans or newcomers to the series. In fact, after getting reacquainted with Cable, B.B. Hood, Marrow, Tron Bonne and War Machine, there's only one problem in the back of my mind: I have no idea how Capcom will improve upon the formula if they decide to make Marvel vs. Capcom 3.—**McKinley Noble**

FUN FACTOR

★★★★½

PROS: [illegible] gigantic roster of colorful characters.

CONS: No quick button for ultra combos; some overpowered fighters.

Flower, Sun and Rain

DS [redacted]

■ Developer: Hand ■ Publisher: Marvelous/XSEED

Whenever someone asks me to describe Flower, Sun and Rain to them, I usually sum it up in one sentence: "It's *Groundhog Day* meets *Twin Peaks*." A remake of a Japanese PS2 title, this Suda 51 game (the celebrated developer behind the stylish and off-beat hits killer7 and No More Heroes) is a mind-bending adventure that's ultimately more confusing than it is profound.

Time Stood Still

Flower, Sun and Rain has a mind-boggling presentation that is unique and interesting but it's sure to alienate some gamers. Still, when the game works, it really works. When it doesn't—let's just say you better have a protective case for your DS to protect against sudden collisions with the wall.

The bulk of Flower, Sun and Rain is spent navigating the blocky, polygonal world of Lospass Island. Various objectives get in your way, and using your trusty briefcase computer (named Catherine of all things), you "jack-in" to it via an assortment of cables. From there, you're presented with a number of empty black boxes. Via Catherine, you spin a combination lock and decipher a code to solve the puzzle based on a series of obscure hints. You get a "Hit," you proceed to the next task. You get a "Blank," you start over.

A Mystery Wrapped Inside a Riddle

Figuring out answers for each puzzle can range from simply finding a special code that fits the designated blanks to spending the next hour writing out math equations via the DS' touch screen. While solving many of FSR's puzzles is incredibly satisfying, the frustration that comes with the territory is sure to wear on even the most patient gamer. The game sometimes feels more like homework than fun at points. There's also quite a bit of frustrating backtracking throughout the title which is made worse by the fact that you have to walk everywhere.

While I salute Flower, Sun and Rain for its innovation, its mind-boggling puzzles and surreal gameplay makes for one hell of a trip. At times, it's a post-modern masterpiece but mostly, it's a chore to play through. Flower, Sun, and Rain is an intriguing adventure that you should only think about embarking on if you're in it for the long haul.—**Will Herring**

FUN FACTOR

PROS: Absolutely bizarre; clever script; [redacted] soundtrack.

CONS: Absolutely bizarre to a fault; too much backtracking; muddy visuals.

Guitar Hero On Tour: Modern Hits

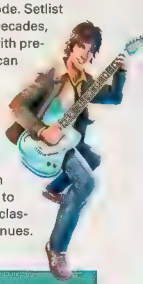
DS [redacted]

■ [redacted] Activision

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Guitar Hero franchise has always been the series' universal appeal. From classic oldies to contemporary favorites, Guitar Hero became a household name by offering something to every audience. That being said, it always makes me weary when the tried-and-true formula is applied to a specific time period or genre, such as the oft-criticized Guitar Hero Encore: Rock the 80s. It doesn't take much for a game to jump the shark from toting itself as a brand new experience to suddenly acting as an over-priced expansion pack. While Modern Hits doesn't quite fit into either of those extremes, it doesn't bring enough new to the table to really stand on its own two feet.

With 28 tracks featuring current favorites from Wolfmother to the Kaiser Chiefs, Modern Hits celebrates just that: plenty of noteworthy songs from the past few years. Now, the general Guitar Hero formula hasn't changed since its On Tour debut, but Modern Hits does bring plenty of new features to the table. One of the most notable additions is the inclusion of Fan Requests: fun little challenges with unique victory requirements (complete a song without any note bombs, etc) that are vital in progressing through Career Mode. Setlist connectivity has returned from Decades, allowing you to sync your DS up with previous On Tour iterations so you can jam to their respective tracks.

Even with these minor additions, Modern Hits never really justifies itself as an upgrade from the stellar Guitar Hero: Decades. Still, any on-the-go rock star is bound to have a blast with the ageless GH gameplay, not to mention the return of plenty of classic characters and brand new venues. —**Will Herring**



FUN FACTOR

PROS: Fun Guitar Hero gameplay; Fan Requests are a blast.

CONS: Relatively weak setlist; nothing too new or innovative.

The MotionPlus accessory adds a great sense of accuracy to the Wii's motion controls. It also adds a nice sense of heft and weight to the Wii Remote as well.

Wii MotionPlus

We just got one step closer to authentic lightsaber duels on the Wii!

Wii | ESRB: N/A | ■ Developer and Publisher: Nintendo

The Wii's motion sensing controls are revolutionary and innovative but they still leave something to be desired when it comes to accuracy. While the control scheme works fine for games like Wii Sports and Boom Blox, games like Red Steel proved that the technology still had room for improvement.

In order to remedy this, Nintendo has developed the Wii MotionPlus, an add-on that promises to bring greater accuracy and motion sensing. We handed a MotionPlus along with two of the first games to offer support (EA Sports' Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10 and Grand Slam Tennis) to Drew Fama, a writer for our sister site GamePro Sports. Read on for his impressions and find out if it's enough to get gamers off their couches or if it should be renamed the MotionMinus. First up: Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10.

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10

Grand Slam Tennis

Eye of the Tiger

The MotionPlus accessory adds a new level of depth to the swing mechanics in Tiger Woods 10. With the stock Wii Remote, you end up feeling like Charles Barkley taking hacks with your clubs. The new Precision Putt mechanic is downright unusable as well. But the Wii MotionPlus adds a noticeable dimension of accuracy to your game. It also dramatically improves the awesome disc golf mini-game, giving you access to a full range of motion. After playing several rounds both with and without the accessory, it's safe to say that you shouldn't even bother with Tiger unless you use the MotionPlus add-on.

Tennis Anyone?

Like Tiger Woods 10, Grand Slam Tennis is considerably better with MotionPlus. Your digital avatar's racquet animations will follow your real life movements and you gain a noticeable degree of control on your shots. Without the accessory, the game is nothing more than Wii Sports tennis with graphic and roster updates included; those great shots that could've been hit with MotionPlus are also replaced by generic shots that lack diversity.

Plus and Minus

The new MotionPlus add-on changes the way gamers play on the Wii and these first two titles are a good testament to how satisfying the experience can be. From playing against the pros at Bethpage Black to having a dream match at the center court of Wimbledon, MotionPlus creates a new level of reality that likens these sports titles to their real life counterparts. It'll be interesting to see how MotionPlus works with future titles like Gladiator A.D. and the next Legend of Zelda but early indications are that the MotionPlus delivers on its promises.

The technology will probably only improve as time goes on as well, so hopefully, we'll finally get that true sense of 1:1 motion controls that we've been lusting after ever since the Wii was released. The MotionPlus retails for a reasonable $20 and it also comes bundled with Tiger Woods 10 as well as the upcoming Wii Sports Resort.—**Drew Fama**

Over the years, the phrase "gamer" has come a long way. What was once an elite sub-culture has flourished over the years into a full-fledged way of life. The impact of gamer culture is extremely prevalent, affecting everything from the silver screen to the funny pages. Join GamePro as we we take a look at everything that makes the gaming community great, from the latest DVD and comic book releases to everything in between.

StarCraft #1

■ Publisher: Wildstorm Comics ■ Writer. Simon Furman ■ Artist: Federico Dallocchio
■ Price: $2 99 ■ dccomics.com/wildstorm

If you're a StarCraft fanatic, this comic book series is for you. Digging deeper into the SC universe, this on-going monthly series is a perfect way to whet your appetite for the impending release of StarCraft II (not to mention the beta, which we hope will have released by the time you read this). Focusing on the WarPigs, a patchwork team of blackops soldiers who are double-crossed and given one last change at redemption, the story builds upon the events of the first StarCraft game and promises to open up new plotlines that will lead right into StarCraft II.

We've read the first issue and the story is well written and the art is eye-catching. We also appreciated the way writer Simon Furman weaves elements of the game into the storyline. The first issue does a lot of setting up but we can't wait to get our hands on the rest of the series run to see how it all plays out.

Coraline

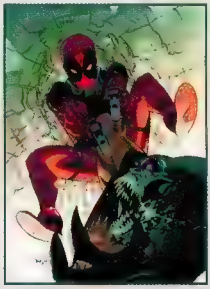
■ Format: DVD/Blu-ray ■ Publisher: Universal Studios ■ Release Date: 7/21/09
■ Price. $29.99 ■ coraline.com, universalstudios.com, neilgaiman.com

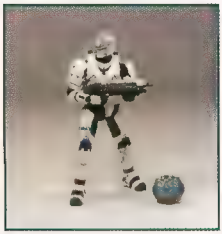
I'm a huge fan of Neil Gaiman's work and while the epic comic-book series Sandman stands at the top of favorites list, his children's novel Coraline is a close second. Director Henry Selick, the genius behind The Nightmare Before Christmas, and LAIKA Studios teamed up to produce a terrific movie adaption that's every bit as charming and scary as the book. The stop-motion animation is top-notch and the story is endearing and sweet without being overly saccharine. Best of all, a 3-D version of the movie is included but for best results, I'd suggest getting the collector's edition which not only includes bonus extras but a digital copy of the movie as well.

Deadpool Volume 2

■ Publisher. Marvel Comics ■ Writer: Daniel Way ■ Artist: Paco Medina
■ Price: $19.99 ■ marvelcomics.com

Despite a downright embarrassing silver screen debut in X-Men Origins: Wolverine, the collaborative genius of Daniel Way (Ghost Rider) and Paco Medina (New X-Men) have taken the crimson comedian under their respective wings and breathed fresh, zany new life into the regenerating degenerate in this second volume of Deadpool's latest solo series. Fresh off the heels of Marvel's Secret Invasion, Deadpool finds himself ripped off by none other than former Green Goblin, and currently most powerful man in the country Norman Osborne. It goes without saying that you shouldn't really steal from a mentally unhinged mercenary with a regenerative healing factor, but some people have to learn the hard way. Deadpool Volume 2 collects issues 6-7 and 10-11 of Way and Medina's acclaimed run on the merc with a mouth, and is a must-own for any Deadpool fan, new or old, with a brilliant mix of high-octane action and gut-wrenching laughs.





HALO 5 Equipment Edition Action Figures

■ Manufacturer: McFarlane Toys ■ Price: $9.99-$12 99 ■ spawn.com

McFarlane Toys is known for producing amazing action figures and their Halo inspired line is probably their best video game related series. With a ton of detail and articulation, these action figures are the best way to extend your Halo experience outside of the video games. Plus, they make awesome cubicle and desk decorations.

This latest line adds some interesting figures to the lineup including the popular Hayabusa armor set that's found in Halo 3's multiplayer mode. You can also add the gruff but inspirational Seargeant Avery Johnson to your collection as well as a Weapons Pack that'll let you kit out your action figures with 16 UNSC and Convenant weapons. These action figures are the perfect way to get ready for the impending release of Halo 3: ODST.

LETTER OF THE MONTH CONTEST

DYNASTY WARRIORS GUNDAM 2 (PLAYSTATION 2)

The Letter of the Month winner will receive Dynasty Warriors Gundam 2 for the PlayStation 2 by Namco Bandai Games. Rated Teen (Fantasy Violence, Mild Language) by the ESRB. Battle on!

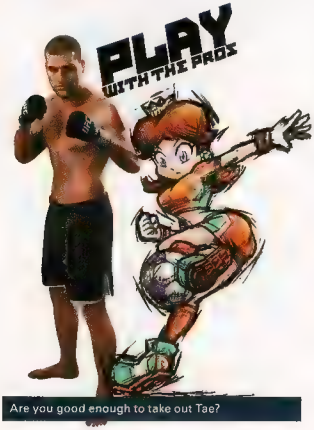
Letter of the Month GP 09 SEPT #252

A PS3 ON THE CHEAP?

I have been a loyal Sony PlayStation customer for years and was wondering if you had heard anything about a PlayStation 3 price drop. If not, should I go and buy an Xbox 360 instead? Also, I still have my PlayStation 2 and was wondering how long games were going to keep being made for that platform.
Phil Ramis—via email

Phil, your question is a commonly asked one. The reality is the PlayStation 3 is an expensive piece of hardware: Blu-ray, a powerful video processor, the Cell CPU, and a large hard drive are a pricey combination any way you slice it. The fact Sony has sold over 20 million PS3s despite its high price point is itself a minor miracle.

That said, Sony knows it needs to drop the price of the PS3 to remain competitive in the long run. Game consoles can't continue to build momentum when they're selling at $400—eventually, the price will have to move closer to $200. Sony hasn't spoken publicly of any plans for a PS3 price drop, but I wouldn't be surprised to see it happen this fall. As to whether you should buy an Xbox 360 in the meantime, that's your call—if the Xbox 360 has the games you want to play, then you should be in good shape. PlayStation 2 remains an attractive budget option, with some 100 games coming out in 2009. But if you want to play the biggest and best titles, it's Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 all the way.



Are you good enough to take out Tae?

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

I play both Xbox Live and PlayStation Network, and I'm getting into competitive gaming. I was wondering if you knew any places you could sign up for online game tournaments?
Morgan Dotson—Prasser, WA

It's hardly the major leagues, but *GamePro*'s own Tae K. Kim has been busy planning a big series of game tournaments and "play with the Pros" nights. So far, we've played matches in Mario Strikers Charged and UFC 2009 Undisputed with *GamePro* readers. And I wouldn't be surprised to see some Red Faction Guerrilla matches pop up, too. There may even be a prize or two in there for the winner, so check it out on the GamePro.com forums.

A word of warning: Tae may look skinny to the untrained eye, but he's a beast in UFC 2009 Undisputed...seriously.

"No Wii? Big Daddy *angry*."

BIG DADDY IS WATCHING

I bought *GamePro* and saw your 10-page article on one of the greatest games ever: BioShock. I must have read that BioShock 2 article like five times: it was well written and the fact you play as a Big Daddy blew me away. I recently bought a Wii, but I started to cry when I found out BioShock 2 isn't coming out that console. Do you think they'll make the sequel for Wii as well? You could swing the Nunchuck for a Plasmid and hold A for a drill attack or to shoot the rivet gun. Wouldn't that be awesome?
Juan Arrieche—via Blackberry

While a Wii BioShock game would indeed be awesome, Juan, I've heard no such plans. Your control scheme sounds spot-on, though I'm not sure a straight port would work well given the Wii's somewhat limited graphical ability. I think it's more likely we'd see a lightgun shooter, à la Dead Space Extraction (itself a fine-looking game). In the end though, who knows?

TONY'S NEW TRICK

Does the new skateboard peripheral for Tony Hawk RIDE work the way it is intended to?
Mavinator—via GamePro.com forums

I did not play with this new-fangled device, primarily out of sheer embarrassment. Luckily, *GamePro*'s esteemed features editor Dave Rudden has no shame: "As a fan of the old-school Tony Hawk style, I'm not on board (heh-heh) with Tony Hawk RIDE right now. My demo with Tony Hawk RIDE was filled with awkward and fruitless limb waving, as I was continually told my motions weren't low or far out enough to trip the game's sensors. As a generally awkward dude, I also felt as if the board would slip out from under my feet and I'd come crashing to the floor—the first man to be carted out of a video game demo on a stretcher. I'm sure the game will generally improve over time, and people with a sense of balance will fare better, but this just doesn't feel like the first five Tony Hawk titles I played so religiously."

Sid sez: "Split/Second might dethrone Burnout Paradise. It's shocking!"

Sid sez: "For a free-to-play FPS, Huxley's actually pretty good."

Sid sez: "Keep your eye on this innovative gem."

E3 Leftovers

What other games did you see at E3 that nobody is covering? We know about Scribblenauts, but there must be other unheard of gems.
Bill Graham—via Twitter

Well, Bill, I've made no secret about loving what I played of Split/Second, an epic combat racer from Disney and Black Rock Studios, the guys behind Pure. I also found Huxley fascinating: it played a bit like Unreal Tournament crossed with an MMO, and it's free-to-play on the PC. Finally, Borderlands looked incredible, like Hellgate: London sans all the suck. I have high hopes for that one.

It was a good show, overall, but my head is still spinning from the over stimulation. What I need now is a cool, dark room to lie down in for the next couple of months. That, and Aliens vs. Predator in my hands now. That is all.

Wii Vital Signs?

Nintendo's Vitality Sensor seems to have limited possibilities compared to Microsoft's Project Natal and Sony's new motion controller. Which do you expect more from?
TehDonkeyKong—via Twitter

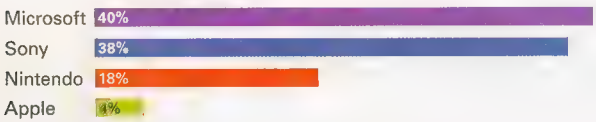
Though it's not impressive at first glance, the Wii's newly announced Vitality Sensor has intriguing potential. It's a pulse sensor you clip onto your finger, and it has implications far beyond mere exercise games. Imagine a horror game that knows how scared you really are by measuring your heart rate, or a stealth game where you have to stay cool in order to sneak past enemies. These are all pipe dreams, of course, but the possibilities are exciting enough for me to stop referring to the Vitality Sensor as the "Nintendo nipple clamp"...for now.

What Microsoft and Sony are doing is vastly different. Microsoft's Natal is promising full-body motion controls, while Sony's motion controller (informally dubbed the "Magic Wand") looks to work like a super-duper Wii Remote. My biggest concern is neither Natal nor the "Magic Wand" will be bundled with their respective consoles, meaning developer support will be spotty. The technology is impressive, but unless Microsoft and Sony are planning to re-launch the Xbox 360 and PS3 with these peripherals bundled in, I'm skeptical they'll find widespread support with gamers or developers. Come 2010, we shall see.

GamePro.com Poll

Results as of September 2009

Who is winning *right now*?



ASK THE GAME GIRL

What career would you ideally like to see yourself in, and do you see the GameGirls as part of helping you to get there?
SinkingPwn 44—Via GameGirl.com

Raychul responds: I am pretty much doing my dream job right now. Working with *GamePro* on GameGirl.com is really just an amazing gig, and I love every aspect of it. I would love to go further with my career in the gaming industry by doing more on-camera hosting and correspondent work covering gaming events and doing interviews. I have done tons of video hosting jobs with sites and magazines like *GamePro*, *Official PlayStation Magazine*, and the Jay Leno show, so it's definitely my passion. I plan to continue working as hard as I can on every project I am involved in and I hope I continue to be able to work in the gaming industry as much as I am now, if not even more.

Send your questions to the Game Girls at **GameGirl.com**

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

What does it mean for the hardcore gamer now that the line between hardcore games and systems is fading fast? With both Sony and Microsoft striving for "Wiiceptance" in casual land, do you see them forsaking the hardcore gamer in times to come?
Numonex—via GamePro.com forums

Microsoft and Sony would be nuts to not widen their horizons and court different kinds of gamers, particularly what I like to call "middlecore" players. Games like God of War and Halo are perfect "middlecore" games because they appeal to both hardcore players and casual players—that's a serious sweet spot Nintendo has trouble matching. That said, I don't think Sony or Microsoft will abandon the hardcore gaming crowd whatsoever. Rather, I think (read: hope) they'll offer a more varied game lineup that will appeal to gamers of all kinds.

That said, I've long argued that the Xbox 360 is going to have a tougher time competing in the casual space. Why? Listen to the name: Xbox 360. Does that sound mainstream and mass market to you? I'd argue the brand sounds more like an elite, possibly neon-green, sports car with gold rims and skull-splitting subwoofers. If Microsoft wants to get serious about the non-hardcore crowd, they need to move past the Xbox moniker for their next system. It's too in-your-face.

Ultimately, I think variety is the key here. As long as the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 are serving all kinds of gamers—from casual to hardcore, and everything in-between—we'll all be sitting pretty.

SONY SLUMP?

How come *GamePro* never reports on the dire financial woes of Sony? Everyone just kind of ignores the fact Sony's stock has dropped this year to an all-time low of $15...it's not just the gaming division, either. Sony's TV division was pushed

Sony unveils its new corporate HQ.

from number one a couple of years ago to close to number four right now. Yet they keep the prices high...fascinating.

How long do you think Sony can keep up this financial beating without completely going belly up? After seeing Pioneer (the best HDTV maker in the world) stop making TVs, I don't think anyone is safe. Do you?
Horris Pinker—via GamePro.com

Sony as a whole has certainly floundered a bit over the last few years, but I don't know if I'd describe the situation as "dire," exactly. And these problems are not confined to Sony: the crap-tastic global economy is wreaking havoc across the entire technology sector. Microsoft, for instance, is struggling mightily in the face of stiff competition from Google, Apple's ever-more-powerful Mac and iPhone platforms, and declining interest in Microsoft products ranging from Internet Explorer to Windows (not to mention the Zune). Times are tough all around...unless you're Nintendo, of course.

Sony is certainly facing some challenges. The company still produces some of the finest televisions in the world, but lower-priced competitors such as Samsung and Vizio are stealing the hearts of cash-strapped consumers. Sony is loathe to compete in the "value" category—it dilutes the brand, dontcha know—but the company might not have much choice. Time, and the economy, will tell.

NO LOVE FOR PUBLISHERS

I don't see why we judge games by their publishers. All they do is budget; we should give the developers the credit they deserve. I think Dan Paladin, co-founder of Alien Hominid, had it right when he said, "Publishers aren't developers, so I think they should stay out of the creative process."
David S.—via email

Well, there you go. For what it's worth, publishers are judged on their ability to condense a sweeping portfolio of games into an umbrella company that stands for, well, something. But your point is definitely taken: let the developers make the games!

Damnation

(PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC)

By EKGPROD

Damnation was an interesting idea. Not many games try to take the Civil War and make an experience worthy enough to quench the thirst of blood-thirsty gamers of this generation. Sure, the History Channel has released their idea of a Civil War game, but the results were less than satisfactory. Maybe one day we will get our epic Civil War shooter.

Unfortunately, today is not that day. The second you put Damnation in your disk tray, it becomes immediately clear that you have made a horrible, horrible mistake. Right from the get go, Damnation disappoints with its archaic graphics. Early in the game, I found myself on the top of a mountain. I turned around to see a row of houses far off in the distance built into the side of the massive rock formation. How cool, I thought, as I zoomed in for a closer look with my sniper rifle. But as I looked closer, I saw that all of them were sloppily thrown up there in such a rush they were glitching through the mountain.

The acrobatic angle the game tries so hard to engulf you in just ends up falling flat due to the wonky controls. This is one of those games where no matter where you adjust the sensitivity, you're crap out of luck. The story is convoluted. The graphics are glitchy, low-res and uninspired. The voice acting is horrific. The enemies are completely stupid. The aiming severely broken. The multiplayer community non-existent. The entire experience is lazy, unfinished, and unprofessional. Please, don't think co-op with a friend can help make this wreck any more fun than it already isn't. Nothing can save Damnation.

Fun Factor: ★

X-Men Origins: Wolverine

(PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, DS, PSP, PC)

By Timsobe_The_Defiler

X-Men Origins: Wolverine is extremely well done for a movie game, and plays as if Kratos was reskinned, given claws, and thrown into the X-Men universe. The camera sometimes lags a bit, and the enemies aren't the brightest, but I would definitely give this a go. It's action packed and gory as hell on wheels. I enjoyed this game a little too much, with almost three playthroughs. But if you're not a fan of hack-n-slash games, or the X-Men, I'd recommended a rental.

Fun Factor: ★★★

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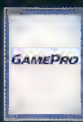

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OMGHalo.com
24/7 coverage of all things Halo. All hail Master Chief!

XboxFanForce.com
News for Xbox fans, by Xbox fans.

Art Attack!

Dynasty Warriors Gundam 2 (Xbox 360)

The Art Attack! winner will receive Dynasty Warriors Gundam 2 for the Xbox 360 by Namco Bandai Games. Rated Teen (Fantasy Violence, Mild Language) by the ESRB. Battle on!

Laurie Henson
of Lexington Park, MD

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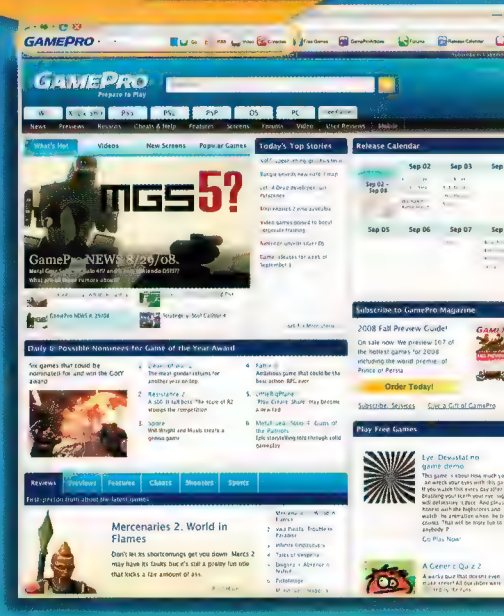

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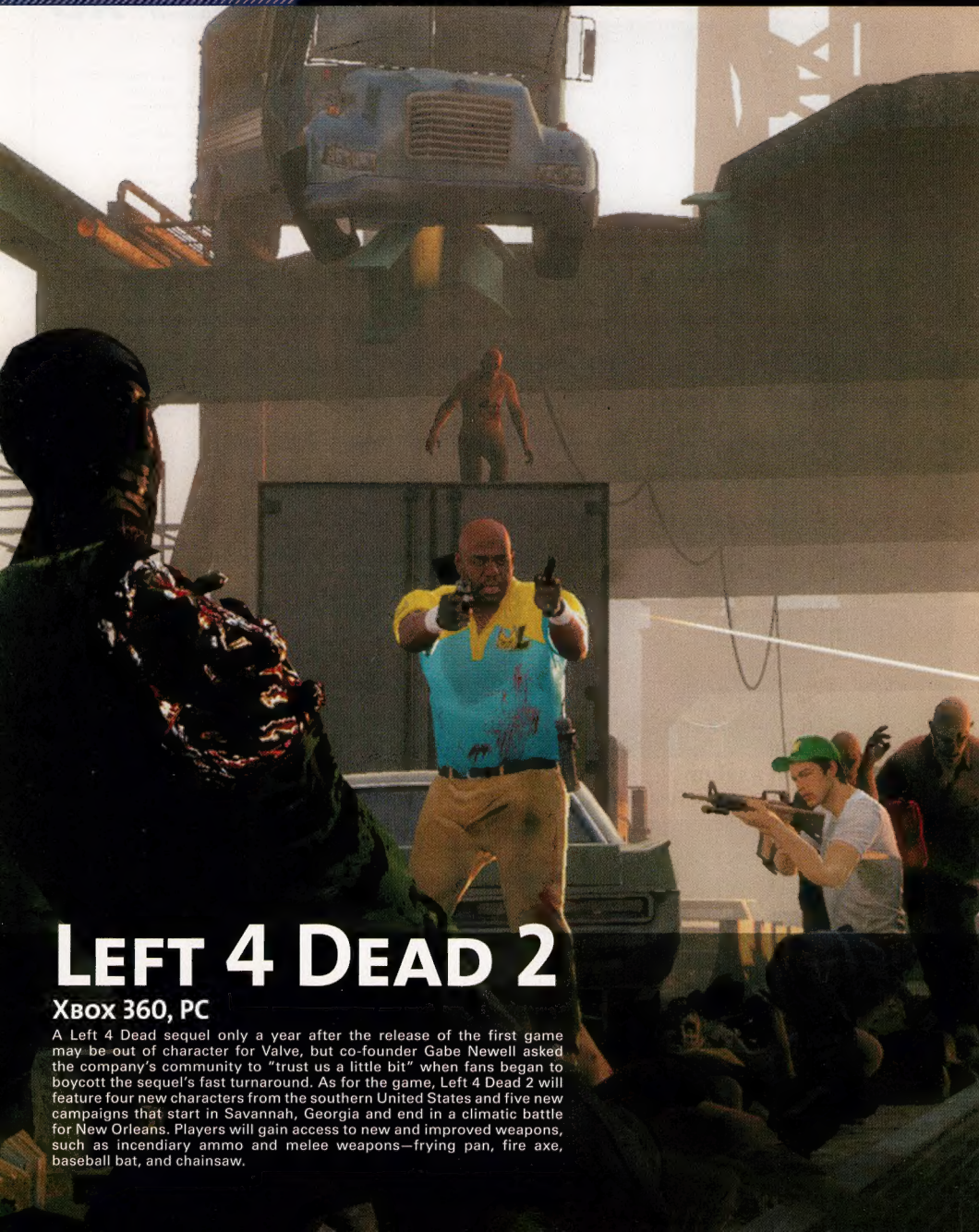

LEFT 4 DEAD 2

XBOX 360, PC

A Left 4 Dead sequel only a year after the release of the first game may be out of character for Valve, but co-founder Gabe Newell asked the company's community to "trust us a little bit" when fans began to boycott the sequel's fast turnaround. As for the game, Left 4 Dead 2 will feature four new characters from the southern United States and five new campaigns that start in Savannah, Georgia and end in a climatic battle for New Orleans. Players will gain access to new and improved weapons, such as incendiary ammo and melee weapons—frying pan, fire axe, baseball bat, and chainsaw.

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